

GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S SIN

by

Hyman J. Appelman
Author, "*Ye Must Be Born Again*"

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRICE OF SOULS

"Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8).

ORIGINALLY the name Zion denoted the mount on which Solomon's Temple stood. In later years, the whole city of Jerusalem was called Zion. Still later all of Palestine came to be known as Zion. Still later all of the Jews, scattered to the ends of the earth, as a nation, in prophetic and rabbinic writings, came under the term "Zion." Today the church, the church of the living God, the body of the blessed Christ, all born-again, blood-washed, spirit-regenerated children of God, all of the souls that can truthfully and Scripturally lay claim to salvation, are Zion.

Travail is a term that is familiar to all of us. Perhaps there is no agony that is comparable with the pain suffered by a woman in childbirth. The prophet adds these terms in the terrific statement of the text, **"For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children."**

The implication is clear. When the people of God become so burdened for the souls of sinners about them that they suffer agony and anguish that they are willing to make a highway of their lives to the cross of Calvary, and when they spend nights of passionate intercession and days of vigilant toil, Zion will bring forth her children. The shouts of newborn souls will be heard in the corridors of glory. That is as it should be.

Travail is the secret of the success in this workaday world, in every sphere of human activity. Great lawyers are not made overnight, neither are great doctors, nor are great engineers.

Greatness, success, victory in any pursuit, must be paid for by toil, by effort, by self-denial, by unremitting pursuit. The price of achievement comes very high.

Consider the travail of a mother rearing one or more children. Think of the sleepless nights, of the drivingly busy days and think of the agony of wearying hours of nursing the sick little ones.

What real mother does not pay the full price of travail for the children of her heart?

Travail built the church. The world criticizes us because of the blood theology we proclaim. They say there is too much blood in our religion. That is not so. There is not enough blood. When we cease bleeding, we cease blessing. There is not enough sacrificial blood spilled by the present Christian generation.

The blood of Jesus, the travailing, agonizing, torment-drawn blood of Jesus laid the foundations of the church. Its walls were erected and cemented together with the sacrificed bodies and spilled blood of the martyrs that have trodden the holy road of Calvary in the footsteps of the Master. Blood, blood, oceans of blood, blood of men, of women, of children, streaming oceans wide across the pages of Christian history, has marked the progress of the church.

- Blood wrote the New Testament.
- Blood sealed the testimony of first-century Christianity.
- Blood brought in the Reformation.
- Blood laid the foundation for missions.
- Blood preserved the faith of our fathers in the dark centuries of Romish night.
- Blood spanned the seas, bridged the rivers, crossed the continents, tunneled the mountains, heralded the words of life to the nations and the kingdoms and the tribes of the earth.

Yes, by the agony of Calvary, by the torment of the martyred dead, by the crucified Peter, by the beheaded Paul, by the blood-soaked Roman arenas, by the dungeoned victims of the Inquisition, by the bones of Huntington, by the enshrined heart of Livingstone, by the Bedford Jail of Bunyan, by the loneliness of Roger Williams, by the snow-melting prayer-sweat of David Brainerd, by the torn wrists and wounded, bleeding ankles of Ava's Judson, by the Siberian-exiled Russian Christians, by the concentration-camped German Niemoller, travail built the church.

The greatest need of today, in the church and outside of it, is travailing Christians.

We have educated, talented, wealthy, socially active, politically successful, world-admired, high-positioned Christians. We have Christian doctors of world repute, Christian lawyers of international importance, Christian bankers, statesmen, generals, educators, scientists, that sway the destiny of the earth.

Our need is travailing Christians, weeping Christians, sacrificial Christians. Christianity is not a name but a need, not a title but a task, not a condition but a challenge, a challenge to the loftiest, the holiest, the noblest, the purest in us and among us. Christianity is a heroic undertaking to mold a world in every detail of its activities. Christianity is a religion for and of heroes and heroines. "It does not take much of a man to be a Christian, but it takes all there is of him." Dry-eyed, sober-sided, passionless, emotionless Christianity will not save a world. It will take blood earnestness, sleepless nights, compassion-driven days. We need weeping Christians.

In the South some years ago one of our really great evangelists held a revival. The Lord's blessings were upon it. The crowds came. Scores were saved and added to the church. One evening, a young-appearing mother came to speak to the preacher.

“Brother Evangelist,” she said, “I should like to ask you a very vital question. I have three children—a girl six years old, a boy of twelve, and another boy of fifteen. The little girl is perhaps too young to understand, but the boys are old enough to be saved. I’ve tried to talk to them about Christ and their souls, but they will not listen to me. They come to church all right, but they seemingly are absolutely untouched. Tell me, what can I do with them?”

The evangelist studied the woman a moment. “Madam,” he said, “may I ask you some questions? I presume you are a Christian. Is your husband?”

“Yes, sir, and one of the choicest souls I know. He is a deacon and teaches a Sunday school class.”

“Do you have a family altar in your home? Do you have grace over meat?”

“Indeed we do, sir. We have family worship twice each day and grace at every meal.”

“Do you go to church services consistently and take your children with you?”

“Brother preacher, I guess that perhaps our entire family are the most consistent attendants of the church services of anybody in the community. Our children always go when we go.”

Again the evangelist studied the woman. “Sister,” he said, “will you listen to a plain word without being offended?”

“Yes, sir, you can tell me anything you wish, and I shall not feel hurt. Give me your very best advice, no matter what it may be.”

“Madam, your children are not being saved because your eyes are dry.”

The preacher turned away, and the mother went home.

She wept and prayed all night long. The next morning she gave her husband his breakfast and waited for the children to get up. When they were all about the breakfast table, the mother turned to her older boy. “Johnnie, I’ve been praying as hard as I could that you might give your soul to Christ. Johnnie, will you take Christ as your Saviour?”

The younger boy, named Edwin, hastily stood up, pushed back his chair, dropped his napkin on the table, and ran out of the room. The mother paid no attention to him, but kept on pleading with the first son. The Lord had mellowed the boy’s heart. After some minutes, the mother and son knelt by the side of the dining-room table, and the mother had the infinite joy of praying her son into the kingdom of God. Right then and there he accepted Christ.

Late that afternoon, while the mother was in the kitchen working over the evening meal, Edwin came in to throw himself on his mother’s neck. “Mother,” he cried, “I’m saved! I’ve been saved! I’ve accepted Christ as my Saviour! I am going forward tonight! Is Johnnie? Is Johnnie?”

“Yes, darling, Johnnie has given his heart to Jesus; but tell me, where have you been? What has happened to you?”

“Mamma, last night I could not sleep. I got up out of bed, started downstairs to go to the icebox to get something to eat, and some milk. I passed your door. I thought I heard you crying. I tiptoed in. You were stretched out on the floor praying, asking God to save Johnnie and me. I didn’t go into the kitchen. I went back upstairs and cried myself to sleep. This morning when you started talking to Johnnie, I just could not stand any more. I ran out to the cotton patch, and I’ve been there praying ever since. I have trusted Christ. I know Jesus has saved me.”

That night that mother had the infinite joy of leading her two precious sons to the altar of God, to Christ and into the church. Beloved, I have been in all sorts of revivals, in churches, in brush arbors, in tents, in tabernacles, in school auditoriums, in theaters, in cotton sheds. I have seen landslides for Christ. I have had my heart broken many times over the paucity of results. After these few years of humble yet many experiences in preaching, I can sincerely, spiritually say I have never seen a revival of any size, of any great proportions, that was not paid for by the tears and the agony of some of God’s people. We shall never win these great victories some of our hearts are longing for dry-eyed. Gethsemane and Calvary must always precede Pentecost. We need travailing Christians.

There is plenty of cause for travail, for passion, for compassion, for tears. Think of the numberless hosts of our fellow church-members who have lost the joy of their salvation, who have become cold and indifferent to the things of God and of His Christ. Think of the literal thousands on our church rolls who never darken the doors of their churches, who never pray a prayer, give a penny, or make any sort of an effort to win the lost to Christ. Think of the conduct of many of those who do come to church on Sundays, only to serve the world and the flesh the rest of the week. Think of the hosts of our office-bearers—men, women, young people, filling responsible positions in our organized activities, whose lives are cluttered up with the things of this world, barren, powerless, fruitless. Think of the great numbers of churches of every denomination and persuasion who report no or heart-breakingly few converts and baptisms.

Turn away from our churches now. Let your minds dwell on the moral conditions of our nation—on the gambling, drinking, adultery, divorce, Sabbath-breaking, filthy literature. What an ocean of iniquity has swept across our land! How the devil has enthroned himself in every sphere of activity, in the high places and in the low! Consider the multitudes of unsaved men, women, children engaged in the *dans macabre* of sin, the devil drumming the tempo as their feet beat on the maddening descent into hell.

Increasing in numbers with every passing day, the churches, Sunday schools, revivals, missions, lagging fearfully behind, these multiplied myriads of immortal souls are plunging deeper and deeper into sin and indifference, getting ruder, coarser, harder, more unconcerned.

Billy Sunday said that it was harder to win a fifteen-year-old boy for Christ at the end of his ministry than it was to win a seventy-year-old man when he first began to preach Christ.

Meditate upon these facts. Let them burn into your minds, throb in your hearts, ache in your souls. They will drive you to your knees in an agony of passionate travail that will make you over in your concern for and conduct toward your fellowman. You can see very readily that ordinary, everyday lackadaisical methods lacking fire, empty of passion, lukewarm in intensity, will retire defeated before the marshaled hosts of Satan. No! We need passion, travail, weeping!

It was only by the hot-hearted pressure of Elisha's body that the Shunnamite's son was brought back unto life. It will take the burning-hearted, the sacrificially-surrendered prayers and toil of the people of God to arouse into life this generation so palpably dead in trespasses and sins.

"But," you will say to me, "tell us, preacher, what does it mean to travail? What are the implications in the words of the mighty prophet?"

Beloved, three things are involved in Isaiah's plea, in Isaiah's challenge, in Isaiah's cry.

First, there must be the travail of separation.

There can be no power without surrender.

- Before a corn of wheat can produce grain, it must die.
- Before Jesus could become the Saviour of a lost world, He had to perish on Calvary's cross.
- Before Moses could become the commander-in-chief of the Lord's people, he had to die the forty years in Midian's back lands.
- Before Saul could become Paul, he had to go through a Gethsemane, a Calvary experience, to himself, to his people, to his office, to his preconceived notions.

That is the rule of eternity! That is the dictum of God! No death, no life! No price, no power! "**Come ye out from among them and be ye separate,**" is still the clarion call of the Holy Spirit. They must "**be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord,**" is still the *sine qua non* requirement in the service of the Redeemer.

It will cost travail to divorce oneself from the world, to give up pleasures, some of them seemingly legitimate, to forsake friends, to turn your back upon loved ones, even though you have to tear chunks of your hearts out to do it. Separation comes high, but it leads to God-promised victory, success, fruitfulness.

Where do you stand? Search your heart. Nay, better permit the Holy Spirit to do it. Turn over every key to every room in your being. Hold nothing back, Ananias and Sapphiras are still too common among us. Follow Him as He points out every secret sin, every evil thought, every unholy ambition, and every worldly reservation.

As He directs you, by the agony that loved you, by the cross that bought you, by the blood that washed you, give up, give up anything, everything, all things that are in any way disturbing, dishonoring, disgracing.

Do not fear. Do not hesitate. God wants nothing from you selfishly. It is all for your own good, for your own happiness, for your own usefulness. Turn yourself over unreservedly into the hands of the Master. Yes, He may take you, may break you, may torment you, may mold you into the white heat of His love and power. But, oh, when He is through with you, when He gives you back to yourself that you may serve Him unconstrainedly in the beauty of holiness and virtue of love, you will be a polished instrument fit for the hands of the Great Mechanic. Yes, there must be the travail of separation. God is not looking for golden vessels, but for clean ones, for empty ones.

Second, there must be the travail of intercession.

Prayer is power. Much prayer is much power. Little prayer is little power. No prayer is no power.

There is no substitute for intercession, no shortcut into it. Earthly power is costly. Heavenly power is beyond computation, valuable. The price of it is absolute separation and unending intercession. May I be permitted to include every form of prayer in that one word, intercession.

Study the experiences of the ages. Delve into the lives, the writings, the works, the victories of the mighty souls of every generation. Power followed prayer. Souls were won, churches built, missionaries sent out, money raised, Satan overcome, in the persistent intensity of passionate prayer.

The secret of the success of the apostles, of the first-century Christians, of the Augustines, of the Luthers, of the Knoxes, of the Husses, of the Wesleys, of the Whitefields, of the Moodys, of the numberless others who wrought righteousness in the power of the Lord, always has been separation and supplication. It is the same today.

O dear God, if only our preachers, if only our office-bearers, if only our teachers, if only our fathers, our mothers, our church-members, would realize the way of power, would take the steps of separation and supplication, what a mighty revival would sweep our land! How our lives, our homes, our schools, our businesses, our governments, our national and international entanglements and embarrassments, would be changed! Lord, pour out upon us, even as Thou hast promised, the Spirit of grace and supplication.

This intercession must cover the earth. There must be prayer for ourselves, that our own hearts may be made right, our own lives stretched out on the altar, our own souls filled and thrilled with the Holy Spirit. Pray that we ourselves may be used of God to fish for men. Pray that our own testimony may be conqueringly constraining.

There must be prayer for each other, prayer that will bear up our preachers, our deacons, stewards, elders, teachers, officers, to the throne of grace, to melt their hearts, to move their souls, to empower them for service. Prayer will do more and go farther toward strengthening, encouraging, enlightening, inspiring these whom God has placed in responsible positions than anything else we or they can do. There must be burning, incessant, intercessory prayer for those of our fellow-Christians, church-members, who have wandered away from Christ, drifted out into sin. Prayer will constrain them to come back into God's service.

There must be prayer for the unsaved. Oh, how they need our prayers! They are lost in their sins, on the road to eternal destruction. Their souls are forfeited to Satan. They have no strength, no spiritual wisdom of their own, no inclination toward God. They will not pray for themselves. We who love them, who yearn for their salvation, who know the Saviour, must pray them into the kingdom. There is no hope for them otherwise. They will drift on and on, growing colder, harder, deeper in sin, more indifferent with every passing day. Oh, let our prayers rise up for them in a fountain of travail. Let us immerse them in a sea of prayer. Let us give God no rest until His mercy is extended to these precious souls.

Third, there must be the travail of visitation, of personal soulwinning.

That is the climax, the very capstone of all our travailing. With lives separated unto the Lord, with hearts, souls, minds, knees, bowed before God in the ecstasy of intercession, we receive the commission of the Lord to go afield and reap a harvest for Jesus. That is one of the chief secrets of the success of the early Christians. There was very little if any of the distinction between preacher and people. All were preachers, gospelers, evangelists, duty-bound, soul-obligated, God-sent, Spirit-empowered to witness and to win the lost. Wherever they went, whatever they did, regardless of circumstances and conditions, the primary purpose, the foremost thought, the chiefest passion of their hearts was the salvation of the souls of men. We shall never have great revivals, we shall never have truly great, spiritual, Scriptural churches until our people go back to the sense of personal, apostolic, first-century responsibility.

We must all go. We must all do religious visitation. We must all reap the harvest. That is doing the work of the Master. That is literally following in the footsteps of the Lord. That is carrying out the Great Commission. We preachers must lead the parade. You deacons, church officers, Sunday school teachers, leaders of our people, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, all of you, every one of you, as an army with conquering banners must share the burden and brunt of this great battle. God will use us to answer our prayers, to overcome Satan, to glorify the Master, to sweep in souls.

It is difficult work, sometimes tiring, disappointing, disheartening, discouraging. Some rebuff us. Some abuse us. Some are so coldly, bitterly, cruelly indifferent they tear our hearts. Some promise and break their promises. Some come out for the Lord and then drift back into sin.

The devil seems to anticipate every move we make, throws every sort of an obstacle in our way, introduces every kind of a difficulty. It is trying, testing, troubling toil. But, oh, thank God for some of the victories we win. What greater joy can come to the mortal soul than to help in the salvation of some poor sinner! What reward can this world offer that is even within seeing distance of the thrill of receiving the gratitude of some man, woman, child that you have prayed through and plead through into the kingdom of the Lord!

Think of the joy as it will increase with the passing of the years, as the influences you have started in the lives of wept-in souls spread out and out in greater and ever increasing circles. Think of the value of the reward, the crown that shines brighter than the sun, moon, and stars, the crown of the soulwinner.

Just permit me to close with an illustration from my own poor ministry.

During the first year of my ministry, I held a revival in a very tiny village in Oklahoma. The Lord blessed the campaign. One afternoon the pastor and this preacher were walking down the highway, knocking on doors, inviting people to Christ and the church. We came to a farmyard. This preacher started to open the gate. "It's no use going in there," said the pastor, stopping him; "there lives in this house a family of five—a father, mother, three children. None of them are Christians. The woman is the most wicked character in this town. She is a common harlot. She won't come to church anyway."

"Let's try her, anyway," answered this preacher, opening the gate and walking up on the porch, with the pastor following. He knocked on the door. The woman opened it and stood in the narrow opening, looking at the two men before her.

"Lady, my name is Appelman. I am the evangelist. This is Brother B., pastor of the Baptist church in this town. We have come to invite you to our revival. Our services are at eight o'clock every night. Will you come tonight?"

"I don't go to church, thank you."

"But, lady, one time will not hurt you. Do come tonight."

"If I come to church, the building will cave in."

"No it won't. We are holding the services in the open air."

After some more pleading and persuasion, the woman promised to come the next night. She came a little late. The usher led her all the way down to the front to place her on one of the very front pews. Two women, who had been sitting there, got up and walked back into the crowd. The preacher began to understand a bit better the reason for the woman's condition. When the service was over, the preacher hurried to the woman.

"Sister, if there is anything I can do or these people can do to make up to you for what happened tonight, tell me, and I shall see that it is done."

"Never mind, I am used to being treated in just that way. I'm coming back tomorrow night. I liked your sermon and appreciate your interest."

The next night she came back. The song service seemed to move her, the sermon to melt her.

When the invitation was given, she was the very first to come to the altar to kneel in prayer. Others came. The pastor and the evangelist knelt down by the mourner's side, and after some prayer and Scripture quoting, she surrendered her heart to Christ and offered herself for membership in one of the churches of the town. Her husband came in as well as the first of her children.

Three years later, this preacher, then a student in the seminary in Fort Worth, held a meeting in the larger town ten miles north of the village where the woman still lived. At the end of the two weeks, early on a Monday morning, he was hurrying back to school, to wife, to Texas. The road led past the home of the woman. She was out in the yard hanging out washing. The preacher saluted her with the car horn. She waved him down, made him stop, and came out to the automobile.

“Brother preacher, please come out and have breakfast with us. Doc [that was her husband] has just taken the cows out. He’ll be right back.”

“Sorry, sister, but I cannot stop. I’ve been away from home and school for two weeks. I am behind in my work. I have a hundred and ninety miles to drive yet. I just must go on. You will have to excuse me.”

The woman put her hands into the car, placed them on the hands of the preacher, on the steering wheel, and with tears streaming down her face, said, “Brother Preacher, we love you, all of us. As long as there is a W___ home in the world, we’ll never forget what you have done for us.”

The preacher said, “Thank God, not me, sister. I am not entitled to it. The Lord has saved your soul.”

He started the car and drove off. Coming to a little bend in the road out of sight of the woman, the preacher stopped his car in the grass off the pavement. He took out his handkerchief, spread it on the steering wheel, and made an altar there.

Lifting his face to the heavens, with his heart’s blood and soul’s affection punctuating every word he spoke, he said: “Lord Jesus, it cost me father, mother, brothers, sister, kinsfolk, friends, money, property, law office, everything almost a man holds dear in life, to become a Christian, to surrender to preach the gospel. Lord, if you never give me another thing as long as I live, you have already paid me in full.”

The preacher meant it then, He means it now. Every time the Holy Spirit uses him to bring a precious soul to the feet of Jesus, his cup of joy, of blessing, of compensation, of reward runs over. God, give us, each of us, all of us, the grace to travail for souls until Zion brings forth her children.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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