



"The Life of Christ" by James Tissot

A Costly Cornerstone

Isaiah 28:16

**Therefore, thus says the Lord God,
"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.**

Dear Opal,

Many years ago, while traveling through the hilly emerald green ridge and valley region of the Appalachian Mountains to visit an account in Lehighton, Pennsylvania, it truly was a peaceful sight to behold. Beautiful textures of rock formations that dotted the rolling terrain were so breath taking that it would have been impossible to capture their intricate lines and crevices formed by mother nature over the course of time with even the most powerful camera lenses. Appearing as if the Great Artist had hand carved each one, he had then carefully chosen a specified location and nestled them among such an array of green hues that they blended together into a kaleidoscope of movement.

In retrospect, it was obvious that this phenomenal setting acted as a prelude to something memorable that waited just ahead. After all, how could a landscape this spectacular be anything short of a grand opening to what the Creator had predetermined for this unsuspecting child out in the middle of nowhere?

However, as per usual, since the goal of the expedition was to accomplish company business, the beauty and awe just described were quickly stored somewhere in the deep recesses of the mind to be viewed at a later date. Rapidly switching to the brain's business channel, I grabbed my briefcase and prepared to complete a successful appointment with an account.

Having scheduled to spend time mingling with customers and analyzing the product mix selected by the owner, upon entering the retail store my roaming eyes were stockpiling information on the hard drive of the brain for later use. After all, it was about understanding the customer base the account was servicing that would result in building a satisfactory relationship for all involved.

Therefore, it was during this process that a customer entered the store who caught my eye, not because she was a star or someone dressed to the nines that emitted signals of importance, but simply that of a tiny older lady still wearing her apron that covered a flower printed handmade dress along with well-worn black shoes.

Given her lack of attention to exterior trappings, what in the world was causing the magnetic draw that demanded my undivided attention? Thus, continuing to soak in the mystery by allowing my eyes to sweep over her entire person, the

riddle was soon solved. Wearing her salt and pepper hair in a top knot that was held back with plain brown combs, what stood out like an undiscovered jewel was the expression on her face. Soaking in every aspect of the component parts that made up this special allure, her sparkling enormous blue eyes, unimpeded by simple spectacles, appeared to be dancing with such joy that a lively sweet smile joined in and was frolicking its way across her peachy effervescent complexion carving a happy trail all the way to her ears.

Feeling my fixed gaze, she paused and offered a greeting using a gentle voice that exuded enormous love and peace, so much that the memory of her actions has lasted undisturbed in my treasure chest of life for years.

Consequently, without restraint, I approached her with the following question, *“Are you aware of how lovely and peaceful you appear? Your entire countenance absolutely radiates with such abounding joy that it literally floats like a cloud throughout the space you enter. May I inquire as to how you have arrived at this point on your journey of life?”*

Without hesitation, she charmingly smiled and replied, *“Honey, like everyone that has ever lived on this earth, I have climbed mountains and crossed deep valleys but never alone. God has been with me the entire time, through thick and thin, as the Cornerstone of my existence.*

In Scripture, Jesus is referred to as the Cornerstone because that is how they used to erect buildings. They would place a large specific stone at the corner as part of the foundation. Then all measures and direction were taken from this stone to ensure that the building was square.

After soaking in this Scripture, I chose early on to accept this fact and allowed him free reign in my life, a decision that I have never regretted. He is my Great Shepherd and I am his sheep; a position that allows him to lovingly care for me.

So, early on, he taught me about the important things in life; spiritual blessings, not materialistic trappings. He let me know that I would be here until he got ready for me to come to my eternal home.

Over time, he became the very best friend I have ever had, bar none. And... in so doing, he blessed me with wisdom to figure out what life is all about. So, sweet

girl, here comes the bottom line this old lady desires to share with you. ***"You will never see a U-Haul hooked to a casket."*** And...so it was!

Opal, even though many years have passed since making this encounter, it is as vivid in my mind today as then, or actually even more magnified due to having covered many miles of the terrain my sweet friend described in our all too short conversation. Although this old soul had probably not journeyed far from the remote location as described at the beginning of this letter compared to the geography this old girl covered due to business, nothing could have ever been experienced or obtained that would have rewritten her final comment with more clarity or wisdom. Her words loudly ring as true today as when she bestowed them on this unsuspecting stranger in the Appalachian Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Actually, man's wild chase to acquire materialistic trappings has always been the demon that holds the most destructive source of power over a mere human's soul; all due to the incessant desire to be accepted in the eyes of society. The age-old question that still causes havoc to ensue in the minds of humans, ***what will others think if I don't measure up,*** seems to be handed down generation after generation.

Yet, in spite of the warnings that fill the Bible regarding such, we simply can't get it through our heads as basic truth. An example of the vivid manner describing the consequences of such action found in Psalm 49: 16-17 should not only capture our attention, but also prompt immediate action with the words, ***"Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases; for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendor will not descend with them."***

Certainly, since this is written in such literal language its meaning should be obvious to every individual who has to face death; meaning absolutely all of us. So, the usual thinking, "It will happen to everyone else besides me," does not set anyone free from being an exception to the rule.

Having volunteered at the nursing home since retirement and present at the side of many departing residents, this Scripture from Psalm 49 has literally come to life right before my eyes. Those that have placed Jesus as the Cornerstone of their existence take their final breath of earthly air peacefully and joyfully. Some

have spoken about being surrounded by as many as 15 angels, first on the outside of their window and finally at the foot of their bed, while others have literally identified the face of their Savior and called out, “Jesus, O Lord Jesus!”

Unfortunately, some have cried out in fear or tried to hang on by the skin of their teeth with wasted effort. One poor soul, a very wealthy man, even had a sign posted on his door that he was never to be left alone all brought on by his fear of dying.

Not only was I taught during childhood about this truth in Scripture, but also listened to the words of wisdom that flowed from my earthly father’s lips numerous times as he confidently stated, “The only thing we take with us is the goodness we leave behind for others.”

Opal, having written on this subject in such a blunt manner about what is faced by the human race, does this mean in the end life is a lost cause for God’s creation? No, indeed. It is truly the reverse of this statement.

Timothy Keller, in his book, “Songs of Jesus”, summarizes the words from John 2: 21 by stating, “When we unite with him by faith, we receive his Spirit and become a living temple in which God dwells.... He then goes on to say, “There are many endings in life, the greatest one being death. Its mystery and terror are made bearable by the knowledge that Jesus will be with us, into death and out the other side.” He goes on when praying to the Father by saying, “We are your flock, your dwelling, your body, your kingdom, your people, your love.”

Does this mean we are to be sad all our lives and suffer? No! No! No, indeed! Scripture also instructs that he wants us to rejoice and sing praises because all is well with our soul. Our gift comes from and through him; that being his love, because GOD IS LOVE.

Keller goes on to say, “God is the fuel that our souls were designed to run on. So, the greater the submission to the true King, the greater the pleasure. Christians should be so overflowing with the joy of our salvation that we feel the privilege of singing his praises to those who do not know him.”

Truly, it is not about honing our gifts but to develop an intimate relationship with the Costly Cornerstone who, through love, has freely bestowed them on us.

Opal, as we say goodbye today, hear now the lyrics of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" written by Robert Robinson in 1758 as our prayer.

**1 Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it
mount of God's redeeming love.**

**2 Here I find my greatest treasure;
hither by thy help I've come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
bought me with his precious blood.**

**3 Oh, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.**

The Psalter Hymnal, 1987



*Love,
Colene*