



September 2011

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## JESUS HEALS BROKEN HEARTS

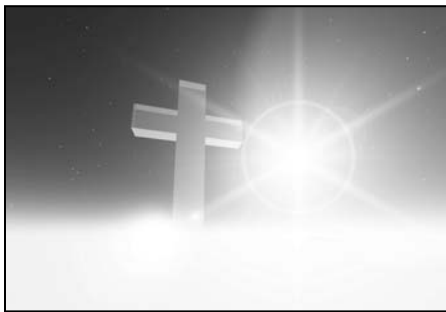
By Ron Allen

James McBride has written a beautiful memoir of his mother who left her white, Jewish upbringing, to marry a black man and become the mother of twelve children.

Rachel Shilsky—that was her name—was sexually abused by her father. So terrified of him was she that she told no one. Traumatized at home and taunted at school for being Jewish, she turned to someone who also knew rejection. She fell in love with a black teenage boy and became pregnant.

If anyone in those days had known, her boyfriend would have been hanged or shot; she would have been kicked out of her home and shunned by her community. She fled to New York where her Aunt helped her get an abortion.

She decided not to return home, but after a while, guilt about leaving her poor mother whose health was failing, overtook her and she went back to visit. She arrived to learn that her father was having an affair with a woman in town. Her sister was helping run the family store and care for their mother. Rachel was told by her father that she *had* to stay and help. Her sister made her promise that she would never leave her alone to care for her mother in ‘this place.’ “Okay, I promise,” Rachel said. But she broke her promise. She could not endure living in the same house as her father. She went back to New York and married an African American named Dennis.



*“Even the worst wrongs, God forgives.”*

was dead. When she finally heard, Rachel was inconsolable, raked by grief and guilt. Dennis kept talking about forgiveness. “God forgives,” he said. “Even the worst wrongs, God forgives.” Slowly the idea took hold in her, and it was her lifeline. She began attending church with Dennis and became a Christian.

After that, Rachel’s mother sickened and died, but her relatives never told her. They didn’t want her to come near her mother; not even to see her corpse. As far as they were concerned, she

Life remained hard for her. Dennis died and she was heartbroken. She married another African American man, and her family grew. Her faith in Jesus struck deep roots. James recalls going to church with her. There he saw her do what she never did anywhere else. It usually happened when the congregation was singing her favorite song: ‘What Friend We Have in Jesus.’ She would bow her head and quietly weep.

“Why do you cry in church, Mama?”

“Because God makes me happy,” she said.

“Then why cry if you’re happy?”

“I’m crying ‘cause I’m happy; anything wrong with that?”

James said, “No.” But there was. Happy people never seemed to cry like she did.

James knew that Mama’s tears came from somewhere else; somewhere far away, a secret place inside her that she never let anyone know about. There was a world of pain behind those tears, a sea of sorrow, a lifetime of suffering. The dissipation of the family of her childhood, her treatment at the hands of an abusive father, her guilt over the abandonment of her mother, estrangement from her sister, the loss of her first husband—all of this was so big as to be beyond speech. She could not share it with anyone. No one, but God.

James McBride says that when he saw his mother cry in church he thought it was because she was white and everyone else in church—including her children—were black. But it wasn’t that. Her grief was drawn from a deeper well.

When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, he showed signs of awful distress. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:34) he told the disciples. The intensity of his anguish frightened them. “They did not know what to say to him” (Mark 14:40).



...he turns to God and prays: “If possible, let this hour pass from me.”

*Continued on the next page*

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# EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

*“Then one of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up. ‘You know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish’” (John 11:49, 50).*

In plotting to get rid of Christ, Caiaphas and his cronies thought they were dealing with just another religious dissident. Theirs were political imperatives. But God was involved in the events of the day. He was about to resolve the problem of human moral dysfunction on a cosmic scale.

Human corruption begs for a final solution; a solution worthy of God. It is not enough that God be forgiving; he must find a way to forgive that does not trivialize the damage, pain and injustice in the world. There has to be a reckoning. Who could trust a God who looked with indulgent affection on child molesters and people smugglers?

Imagine a golf game. Suppose that midway through a round of golf, a spoiler emerges from the trees beside the fairway and places the golf ball in the hole. The intruder may have deduced that the aim of the game is to get the ball into the hole, and he has decided to help. He might even expect gratitude from the players. But he wouldn't get it because the game of golf is predicated on getting the ball into the hole according to a specific set of rules. The game is only satisfying when the rules are followed. The assistance provided by the intruder helps the player to his desired goal in an unworthy fashion.

Nothing is impossible for God, but God refuses to achieve his desired ends using easy, shortcut methods that contradict his own nature, his own rules. He sent his Son. The personal presence of the Son in the world brought the true nature of evil

to light. In procuring the death of Jesus, wickedness disclosed its true ugliness; it bared its fangs, proving its malice toward everything good, right, innocent and beautiful.

Yet, while the world moved to rid itself of the love of God, God moved to judge the world. There was a terrible pause during which God—who makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust, who is not willing that any should perish—stanchd the current of his generosity, drawing the shades against the light of his kindness. Thus did he brought evil to account, cutting it off from his sustaining presence.

But who bore the stroke? Who drank the cup that makes men stagger? Was it Caiaphas, Herod, Judas? Not at all! It was God's own Son. He could have saved Jesus from the nightmare; he could have done it. But his purposes were broader. He so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. There is real forgiveness because God has judged all evil—including our own.

Here is forgiveness that is more than a useless reprieve, a meaningless leniency. God does not say to Jesus, “I can see you are mighty desperate not to drink the cup I have given you to drink. It is my will that you drink it, but since it troubles you so much, it doesn't matter; go now and join your disciples who have all run away.”

The Gethsemane story assures us that God has found a way to salvage human moral wreckage by bearing within himself the catastrophic movement of his own disposition against evil. Thus to offer freely, an authentic, valid, magnificent deliverance; being just and the justifier, of all who believe in Jesus.



*Continued from previous page*

Grief is always sacred. We hush in its presence. But in Christ's grief the reasons for reverence are multiplied. Mark is in no doubt that Jesus was under siege to an extraordinary sadness. He notes two things that seem inexplicable if Jesus was just another victim of human pain and loss.

The first lies near the start of his agony. He has just informed the twelve that a grief is pressing so hard that he feels life being crushed out of him. That is when he turns to God and prays: “If possible, let this hour pass from me.” And

again: “Father, take this cup from me” (Mark 14:35, 36).

The ‘hour’ and the ‘cup’ are one and the same. They signify something woeful, terrifying. This is not the first time Jesus has spoken of the cup. He had asked James and John, “Can you drink the cup I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I baptized with?” In the Old Testament, the ‘cup’ is associated with God's judgment of evil. In Isaiah 51:17, 22, it is the “cup of God's wrath”; the goblet that makes men stagger. See also Psalm 60:3. Jesus' prayer shows that he is gripped by a paroxysm of dread of something coming to him from the hand of God. →

## GOOD NEWS Unlimited

Good News Unlimited magazine is published every month by Good News Unlimited, P.O. Box 6687, Auburn, CA, USA 95604-6687.

Good News Unlimited is an interdenominational Christian organization proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. Special emphasis is placed on the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ's righteousness alone. GNU also links the gospel to the needs of the whole person, to life-style, and preventive medicine.

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Good News Unlimited is a nonprofit religious corporation supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA and Canada. An annual review of GNU's accounts is made by an external auditor. All regular donors to GNU may receive a financial statement on request.

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**This magazine is free upon request.**

September, 2011  
Vol. 30, No. 9

Published by Good News Unlimited

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The *hour*, the *cup*, and the *baptism* are Christ's destiny. From the beginning of his public life they have loomed on his horizon. Now he experiences them viscerally—and God seems to be behind it all!

The second hint in Mark's narrative, which separates Jesus' calamity from all others, is in Mark 14:41, 42. Against his instinct for personal survival, Jesus clings to the will of God. The disciples engage in no such struggle. They lie sleeping. But Jesus wakes them and says: "*Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed in the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go.*"



*Against his instinct for personal survival, Jesus clings to the will of God.*

These are not the words of a man surprised by an unanticipated misfortune, but of one who has been preparing for, and steeling himself, for this very moment. Sensing clear and present danger, the disciples run off. Not Jesus. Nor does he cower like a cornered fugitive. No! He walks into the custody of his enemies as one in command.

The arrest is no accident. Jesus appears himself to have been involved in the timing of the events. Weeks before, in Galilee, he had set out on a journey which he knew would land him in Jerusalem at this time. Upon arrival, he had precipitated the wrath of the authorities by expelling the temple merchants. Day after day he had kindled the wrath of priests and elders by boldly teaching in the temple courts. Meticulous were his arrangements to eat the Passover with his disciples on this particular night. During that very Passover, he let Judas know that he was aware of his plan to sell him out to the priests and rulers. He told him to 'get on with it.' Jesus orchestrated his movements in such a way as to cause his Passion to occur at Passover time.

In permitting himself to be arrested, Jesus is consistent with the logic of his prayer. He had asked his father to 'get him off the hook'; to find a less harrowing course for him to take. But he ended: "*Not my will but yours.*" His prayer notwithstanding, it remains God's will for Jesus to drink the cup of judgment. In settled assent to the will of God, he leaves the garden to face those who intend to kill him.


True. Jesus is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Evil

catches him in its snare. For the next eighteen hours he will be subjected to some of the worst barbarities ever devised by man. But the significance of Jesus' ordeal does not come from what his fellow man does to him. Many before and since have suffered equally or worse: some boiled alive in oil, some stretched on racks, drawn and quartered, impaled, or torched.

The true dimensions of the horrors that befell Christ derive from the fact that God was there; there was a divine task to be accomplished, a cup to be drunk. Not the cup of Judas, or that of Caiaphas. The mystery of Gethsemane and the cross that followed it lies in this: that though his trial and execution was in every way the carrying out of the malevolent will of man, *that* will was at the same time surmounted and subjugated by the will of God.

The New Testament reporting of Christ's suffering is remarkable in that it makes very little at all of what his torturers did to him. His crucifixion is not pictured as martyrdom. What grips the minds of believers is the role of God; God was present in the drama that began in Gethsemane.

The priests and elders, Judas and the temple guards, were taking care of business when they affected Christ's arrest. At the same time, however, and in the self-same events, an affair of eternal consequence was being discharged by God in cooperation with his Son. Because of its inveterate hatred for goodness, the *world* put Christ on a cross. Because of his settled antagonism to all that is cruel, hateful, proud and unloving in his life, *God* executed judgment on a world epitomized by Jesus. God "*made him to be son for us—who knew no sin—that we might be the righteousness of God, in Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Because of what God did, there is forgiveness in the world. Yes, the universe is a moral place, and we cannot hide from the dissonance we create by our mess-ups. Rachel Shilsky's life was littered with so many mistakes she came near drowning in guilt and regret. She found healing for her soiled and wounded self in Jesus. She found peace for her troubled conscience. Because of Jesus there is forgiveness in the world. "*There is a balm in Gilead; there is a physician there.*" 



*What grips the minds of believers is the role of God...*

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# HE SAVED OTHERS...

By Desmond Ford

As we see our Lord offering himself in Gethsemane, voluntarily going forward to be taken, permitting his hands to be bound, can we not hear him whisper from the cross, "I did not save myself, that I might save you; I did not turn my face from shame and spitting, so that your face might be irradiated with glory. I carried a cross that you, one day, might carry a scepter. I wore the crown of thorns, that you might wear a crown of glory. I hung in agony that you might sit in triumph. I plumbed the depths that you might rise to the heights..."

Suppose I said to you, "Would you like a life where you are screened from all trouble, from all care, from all sickness, from all slander, from all opposition?" When I read that sentence I say, "Yes, Lord, give me that." But the Lord would say to me, "How can it be; the Scripture must be fulfilled: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." What son or daughter is there whom the Father does not chasten for their good? The Scriptures must be fulfilled that say, "Take up your cross daily and follow me."


When his disciples would defend him, he protests: "The cup which my father gives me, shall I not drink it?" A cup is a light thing and only for a moment. All the

worries of this life compared with eternity are as nothing, just a cup. God is much too loving to do anything that is ultimately wrong or unkind. May he help us to measure all things by the Cross and eternity, and then we will see good where once we had seen evil, we will see glory where once we had seen shame, we will recognize health and life rather than just pain.

At the same time Christ said to the soldiers, "This is your hour and the hour of darkness." In Scripture, we often read of the day of salvation, but the hour of darkness is the time when wickedness seems to predominate and the good is submerged. But it is only for an hour. The gospel is never buried for longer than three days.

Then he commands, "If you seek me, let these go their way." Who was it that came searching for Jesus? Was it the Roman soldiers, the Jewish temple servants, or was it really Judas and Caiaphas and Annas? No, it was the Law that came seeking him; judgment came seeking him, the justice of God came seeking him, for he was the appointed substitute for a sinful world. Everything that happened to Christ is what should happen to the sinner.

-Desmond Ford:

JESUS ONLY. pp. 141, 142. 



*I hung in agony that you might sit in triumph.*

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