

Fifteen Miles from Heaven

Moses E. Lard, the well-known gospel preacher of the nineteenth century, kept a preaching appointment at Richmond, Missouri in 1853. As he was hitching his horse near the meeting house, a black man named Dick, a brother in Christ, approached him and introduced himself. He told Lard that he once belonged to the church at a place called "Stanley's," where an "old brother Warrinner" used to preach but, after Warrinner's death, the church there ceased meeting, depriving Dick for a long time of the privilege of assembling with the saints. Yet, his faith in Christ had remained steadfast. "I have come fifteen miles today to hear you preach," he said, "and I have brought with me my young master, Thomas. I think he would be a Christian if he knew how."

After being introduced to Thomas, Lard went into the house to begin the services. He strongly believed in divine providence and wondered to himself if God's hand were in the presence of Dick and his master. The audience was large, but not a Christian there had come fifteen miles, a considerable distance in that day. But here was a bondservant who, after working hard all week, had traveled that far to attend the meeting.

Lard was still thinking about Dick's words as he entered the pulpit to begin his lesson. "Thomas was in the congregation - a circumstance which I determined not to forget for the next hour and a half," he later recalled. And through his speech, he kept steadily in mind "a plain, honest boy of sixteen." The simple sermon, deliberately delivered in the "plowman's phrase" that had been Lard's early dialect, accomplished its purpose. When the invitation was extended, Thomas went forward and gave the preacher his hand.

"Poor Dick was as near Heaven then, as he will ever be again, until he reaches that blessed abode. He could not sit, he could not stand, he did not shout but clapped his hands, while tears ran over those toil-worn cheeks. He meekly occupied a distant corner of the house, and, I felt, if angels delight to gather around the heart that is full of gratitude to Christ, surely they must have had a strong pleasure in folding their wings in that corner just then." Thomas was baptized into Christ that evening.

A little more than two weeks later, at the request of Dick and Thomas, Lard went to the community near their home to preach for two days in the shade of some large trees. There a modest stand and some crude seats had been erected to accommodate the services. Resolved to make the most of the limited time, the first day Lard preached two-and-a-half hours to a large audience of "an honest, agricultural people, blessed with pertinent common sense and sound hearts." The sermon made a favorable impression on most of those present.

The next day the audience, undiminished in size, gathered again to hear another equally long sermon. At the close, four men came forward to confess Christ. Excitement was such that Lard thought it would be unwise to leave the people in the present mood in order to meet another appointment where nothing might be accomplished. So he decided to stay.

The third night eight more confessed their faith in Christ, and before the meeting closed, forty had been baptized for the remission of their sins. Furthermore, those who remained of the old Stanley's church came to take seats in the assembly of the saints. On the Lord's day, the brethren, old and new, met at a convenient place a mile distant to organize a New Testament church. They invoked the protection of God and resolved to be faithful in His service. "A table was then spread, and on it were placed the emblematic loaf and cup. The supper was then eaten in memory of the Master, a song sung, and the services of the hour closed" (Lard's Quarterly, Sept., 1863, pp. 23-25).

The church, known as South Point, was located in Ray County, Missouri. It came into existence primarily because a chattel slave who was also a bondservant of Christ loved both of his masters enough to travel fifteen miles to hear the gospel. That journey may have been the difference between heaven and hell for Thomas and for many others as well. God, in the exercise of His providence, very often uses what to us may seem to be an insignificant act of faith to accomplish His purposes.

Heaven, indeed, my sometimes be just "fifteen" miles away.

- by Earl Kimbrough

God Comes First (Matthew 6:33)

Loving Him with our whole heart is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-37). We say it and sing it, but do we practice it? What do our calendars say? What about those Sundays when the kids have a ball game or when we are on vacation - does He come first those Sundays? What do our checkbooks say? Does He come first in finances or is He somewhere down the list, perhaps even beneath what we spend on recreation? What do our closets say? Do our wardrobes reflect godliness or worldliness? In the Apostle's words, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

- by **Frank Himmel**

Once Saved, Always Saved?

This popular denominational doctrine is also known as "The Impossibility of Apostasy" or "The Perseverance of the Saints." The Westminster Confession describes it this way: "They whom God hath accepted in His beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of Grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

This doctrine is NOT supported by what is taught in God's Word. Note:

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:4) This verse shows that some that were in God's grace could fall from His grace. How can this Scripture be harmonized with the statement above?

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." (Hebrews 3:12-14) This passage is addressed to "brethren," and they are warned about the possibility of "departing from the living God" and about being "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Their salvation was conditional upon holding "the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:20-22) Observe those who are described in this text - people who had "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord." These people were saved, but they could be "entangled" again and "overcome." And, that latter state would be worse than before they had ever known the Lord. Clearly, they could be lost after having been saved.

More Bible verses are available on this subject, but just these three passages make it clear that "once saved, always saved" is not taught in God's Word.

- by **Greg Gwin**