

Some of you read the story that follows during our Advent Meditative Worship last week, but I want everyone to meet Martin Avdeich. This story, “Where Love is, There God is Also,” was written by Russian author Leo Tolstoy in 1885.

The story is a bit long, but it’s worth the read. My prayer is that you and I will also experience and live out its truth



In the city lived Martin Avdeich, a shoemaker. He lived in a basement, in a little room with one window. The window looked out on the street. Through the window he used to watch the people passing by: although only their feet could be seen, yet by the boots Martin Avdeich recognized their owners. He had lived long in one place, and had many acquaintances. Few pairs of boots in his district had not been in his hands once and again. Some he would half-sole, some he would patch, some he would stitch around, and occasionally he would also put on new uppers. And through the window he quite often recognized his work. Avdeich had plenty to do, because he was a faithful workman, used good material, did not make exorbitant charges, and kept his word. If he could finish an order by a certain time, he accepted it: if not, he would not deceive you—he told you so beforehand. And all knew Avdeich, and he was never out of work.

Avdeich had always been a good man; but as he grew old, he began to think more about his soul, and get nearer to God. Martin’s wife had died when he was still living with his master. His wife left him a boy three years old. None of their other children had lived. All the eldest had died in childhood. Martin at first intended to send his little son to his sister in the village, but afterwards he felt sorry for him: he thought to himself, “It will be hard for my Kapiton to live in a strange family. I shall keep him with me.”

And Avdeich left his master, and went into lodgings with his little son. But, through God’s will, Avdeich had no luck with children. As Kapiton grew older, he began to help his father, and would have been a delight to him, but fell sick, went to bed, suffered a week, and died. Martin buried his son, and fell into despair. So deep was this despair, that he began to complain of God. Martin fell into such a melancholy state that more than once he prayed to God for death, and reproached God because He did not take away him who was an old man, instead of his beloved only son. Avdeich also ceased to go to church.

And once a little old man, a fellow countryman, came from the Troitsa (Trinity) Monastery to see Avdeich: for seven years he had been absent. Avdeich talked with him, and began to complain about his sorrows.

“I have no more desire to live,” he said; “I only wish I were dead. That is all I pray God for. I am a man without anything to hope for now.”

And the little old man said to him, “You don’t talk right, Martin: we must not judge God’s doings. The world moves, not by your skill, but by God’s will. God decreed for your son to die, for you—to live. Consequently, it is for the best. And you are in despair, because you wish to live for your own happiness.”

“But what shall one live for?” asked Martin.

And the little old man said, "We must live for God, Martin. He gives you life, and for His sake you must live. When you begin to live for Him, you will not grieve over anything, and all will seem easy to you."

Martin kept silent for a moment, and then said, "But how can one live for the sake of God?"

And the little old man said, "Christ has taught us how to live for God. You know how to read? Buy a Testament, and read it: there you will learn how to live for God. Everything is explained there."

And these words kindled a fire in Avdeich's heart. And he went that very same day, bought a New Testament in large print, and began to read. At first Avdeich intended to read only on holidays; but as he began to read, it so cheered his soul that he used to read every day. At times he would become so absorbed in reading that all the kerosene in the lamp would burn out, and still he could not tear himself away. And so Avdeich used to read every evening. And the more he read, the clearer he understood what God wanted of him, and how one should live for God; and his heart constantly grew easier and easier. Formerly, when he lay down to sleep, he used to sigh and groan, and always think of his Kapiton; and now he only exclaimed. "Glory to Thee! Glory to Thee, Lord! Thy will be done."



And from that time Avdeich's whole life was changed. In other days he too used to drop into a saloon, as a holiday amusement, to drink a cup of tea; and he was not averse to a little brandy either. He would take a drink with some acquaintance, and leave the saloon, not intoxicated exactly, yet in a happy frame of mind, and inclined to talk nonsense, and shout, and use abusive language at a person. Now he left off this sort of thing. His life became quiet and joyful. In the morning he sat down to work, finished his allotted task, then took the little lamp from the hook, put it on the table, got his book from the shelf, opened it, and sat down to read. And the more he read, the more he understood, and the brighter and happier it was in his heart.

Once it happened that Martin read till late into the night. He was reading the Gospel of Luke. He was reading over the sixth chapter; and he was reading the verses, "*And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*" He read further also those verses, where God speaks: "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*"

Avdeich read these words, and joy filled his soul. He took off his spectacles, put them down on the book, leaned his elbows upon the table, and became lost in thought. And he began to measure his life by these words. And he thought to himself, "Is my house built upon the rock, or upon the sand? 'Tis well if on the rock. It is so easy when you are alone by yourself; it seems as if you had done everything as God commands: but when you forget yourself, you sin again. Yet I shall still struggle on. It is very good. Help me, Lord!"

Thus ran his thoughts: he wanted to go to bed, but he felt loath to tear himself away from the book. And he began to read further in the seventh chapter. He read about the centurion, he read about the widow's son, he read about the answer given to John's disciples, and finally he came to that place where the rich Pharisee desired the Lord to sit at meat with him; and he read how the woman that was a sinner anointed His feet, and washed them with her tears, and how He forgave her. He reached the forty-fourth verse, and began to read:

“And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.” He finished reading these verses, and thought to himself, “Thou gavest me no water for my feet, thou gavest me no kiss. My head with oil thou didst not anoint.”

And again Avdeich took off his spectacles, put them down upon the book, and again he became lost in thought.

“It seems that Pharisee must have been such a man as I am. I too apparently have thought only of myself—how I might have my tea, be warm and comfortable, but never to think about my guest. He thought about himself, but there was not the least care taken of the guest. And who was his guest? The Lord Himself. If He had come to me, should I have done the same way?”

Avdeich rested his head upon both his arms, and did not notice how he fell asleep.

“**Martin!**” suddenly seemed to sound in his ears.

Martin started from his sleep: “Who is here?”

He turned around, glanced toward the door—no one.

Again he fell into a doze. Suddenly he plainly heard, “**Martin! Ah, Martin! Look tomorrow on the street. I am coming.**”

Martin awoke, rose from the chair, began to rub his eyes. He himself did not know whether he heard those words in his dreams, or in reality. He turned down his lamp, and went to bed.

At daybreak next morning, Avdeich rose, made his prayer to God, lighted the stove, put on the cabbage soup and the gruel, put the water in the samovar, put on his apron, and sat down by the window to work.

Avdeich was working, and at the same time thinking about all that had happened yesterday. He thought both ways: now he thought it was a dream, and now he thought he really heard a voice. “Well,” he thought, “such things have been.”

Martin was sitting by the window, and did not work as much as he looked through the window: when anyone passed by in boots that he did not know, he bent down, looked out of the window, in order to see not only the feet but also the face. The house-porter passed by in new felt boots; the water-carrier passed by; then came alongside of the window an old soldier of Czar Nicholas' time, in an old pair of laced felt boots, with a shovel in his hands. Avdeich recognized him by his felt boots. The old man's name was Stepanich; and a neighboring merchant, out of charity, gave him a home with him. He was required to assist the house-porter. Stepanich began to shovel away the snow from in front of Avdeich's window. Avdeich glanced at him, and took up his work again.

I AM COMING

“Pshaw! I must be getting crazy in my old age,” said Avdeich, and laughed at himself. “Stepanich is clearing away the snow, and I imagine that Christ is coming to see me. I was entirely out of my mind, old dotard that I am!” Avdeich sewed about a dozen stitches, and then felt impelled to look through the window again. He looked out again through the window, and saw Stepanich had leaned his shovel against the wall, and was either warming himself, or resting. He was an old, broken-down man: evidently he had not strength enough even to shovel the snow. Avdeich said to himself, “I will give him some tea: by the way, the samovar must be boiling by this time.” Avdeich laid down his awl, rose from his seat, put the samovar on the table, made the tea, and tapped with his finger at the glass. Stepanich turned around, and came to the window. Avdeich beckoned to him, and went to open the door.

“Come in, warm yourself a little,” he said. “You must be cold.”

“May Christ reward you for this! My bones ache,” said Stepanich.

Stepanich came in, and shook off the snow; he tried to wipe his feet, so as not to soil the floor, but staggered.

“Don’t trouble to wipe your feet. I will clean it up myself: we are used to such things. Come in and sit down,” said Avdeich. “Drink a cup of tea.”

And Avdeich filled two glasses, and handed one to his guest; while he himself poured his tea into a saucer and began to blow it.

Stepanich finished drinking his glass of tea, turned the glass upside down (a custom among the Russians), put upon it the half-eaten lump of sugar, and began to express his thanks. But it was evident he wanted some more.

“Have some more,” said Avdeich, filling both his own glass and his guest’s. Avdeich drank his tea, but from time to time kept glancing out into the street.

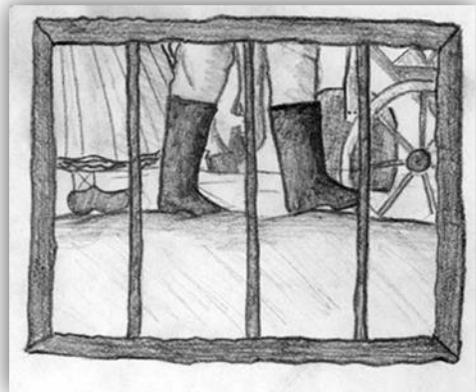
“Are you expecting anyone?” asked his guest.

“Am I expecting anyone? I am ashamed even to tell whom I expect. I am, and I am not, expecting someone; but one word has impressed itself upon my heart. Whether it is a dream, or something else, I do not know. Don’t you see, brother, I was reading yesterday the Gospel about Christ, the Little Father; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?”

“Indeed I have,” replied Stepanich: “but we are people in darkness; we can’t read.”

“Well, now, I was reading about that very thing—how He walked upon the earth: I read, you know, how He comes to the Pharisee, and the Pharisee did not treat Him hospitably. Well, and so, my brother, I was reading yesterday about this very thing, and was thinking to myself how he did not receive Christ, the Little Father, with honor. If, for example, He should come to me, or anyone else, I think to myself I should not even know how to receive Him. And he gave Him no reception at all. Well! While I was thus thinking, I fell asleep, brother, and I heard someone call me by name. I got up: the voice, just as though someone whispered, said, ‘Be on the watch: I shall come tomorrow.’ And this happened twice. Well! Would you believe it, it got into my head? I scolded myself—and yet I was expecting Him, the Little Father.”

Stepanich shook his head, and said nothing: he finished drinking his glass of tea, and put it on the side; but Avdeich picked up the glass again, and filled it once more.



“Drink some more for your good health. You see, I have an idea that, when the Little Father went about the earth, He disdained no one, and had more to do with the simple people. He always went to see the simple people. He picked out His disciples more from among our brethren, sinners like ourselves from the working-class. He, says He, who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who is humbled shall become exalted. You, says He, call me Lord, and I, says He, wash your feet. Whoever wishes, says He, to be the first, the same shall be a servant to all. Because, says He, blessed are the poor, the humble, the kind, the generous.” And Stepanich forgot about his tea: he was an old man, and easily moved to tears. He was sitting listening, and the tears were rolling down his face.

“Come, now, have some more tea,” said Avdeich; but Stepanich made the sign of the cross, thanked him, turned up his glass, and arose.

“Thanks to you,” he said, “Martin Avdeich, for treating me kindly, and satisfying me, soul and body.”

“You are welcome; come in again: always glad to see a friend,” said Avdeich.

Stepanich departed; and Martin poured out the rest of the tea, drank it up, put away the dishes, and sat down again by the window to work, to stitch on a patch. He was stitching, and at the same time looking through the window. He was expecting Christ, and was all the while thinking of Him and His deeds, and his head was filled with the different speeches of Christ.

Two soldiers passed by: one wore boots furnished by the Crown, and the other one, boots that he had made; then the master of the next house passed by in shining galoshes; then a baker with a basket passed by. All passed by; and now there came also by the window a woman in woolen stockings and wooden shoes. She passed by the window, and stood still near the window-case.

Avdeich looked up at her from the window, saw it was a strange woman poorly clad, and with a child: she was standing by the wall with her back to the wind, trying to wrap up the child, and she had nothing to wrap it up in. The woman was dressed in shabby summer clothes: and from behind the frame, Avdeich heard the child crying, and the woman trying to pacify it; but she was not able to pacify it. Avdeich got up, went to the door, ascended the steps, and cried, “Hey! my good woman!” The woman heard him and turned around.

“Why are you standing in the cold with the child? Come into my room, where it is warm: you can manage it better. Right in this way!”

The woman was astonished. She saw an old, old man in an apron, with spectacles on his nose, calling her to him. She followed him. They descended the steps, entered the room: the old man led the woman to his bed.



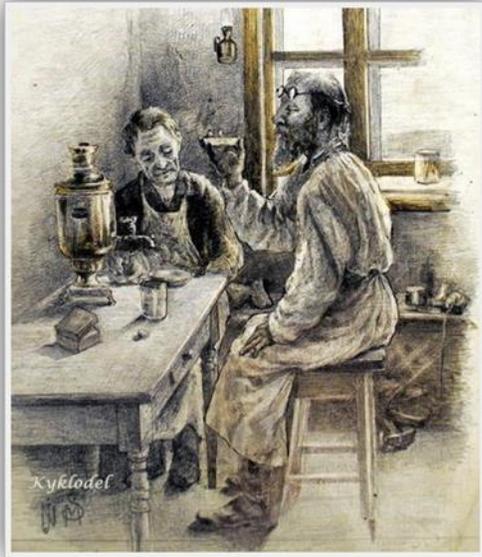
“There,” says he, “sit down, my good woman, nearer to the stove: you can get warm, and nurse the child.”

“I have no milk for him. I myself have not eaten anything since morning,” said the woman; but, nevertheless, she took the child to her breast.

Avdeich shook his head, went to the table, brought out the bread and a dish, opened the oven door, poured into the dish some cabbage soup, and took out the pot with the gruel, but it was not done yet; so he filled the dish with soup only, and put it on the table. He got the bread, took the towel down from the hook, and put it upon the table.

“Sit down,” he said, “and eat, my good woman; and I will mind the little one. You see, I once had children of my own: I know how to handle them.”

The woman crossed herself, sat down at the table, and began to eat, while Avdeich took a seat on the bed near the infant. Avdeich kept smacking and smacking to it with his lips; but it was a poor kind of smacking, for he had no teeth. The little one still cried. And it occurred to Avdeich to threaten the little one with his finger: he waved, waved his finger right before the child’s mouth, and hastily withdrew it. He did not put it to its mouth, because his finger was black, and soiled with wax. And the little one looked at his finger, and became quiet: then it began to smile, and Avdeich also was glad. While the woman was eating, she told who she was, and whither she was going.



“I,” said she, “am a soldier’s wife. It is now seven months since they sent my husband away off, and no tidings. I lived out as cook; the baby was born; no one cared to keep me with a child. This is the third month that I have been struggling along without a place. I ate up all I had. I wanted to engage as a wet-nurse—no one would take me—I am too thin, they say. I have just been to the merchant’s wife, where lives our little grandmother, and so they promised to take us in. I thought this was the end of it. But she told me to come next week. And she lives a long way off. I got tired out; and it tired him, too, my heart’s darling. Fortunately, our land-lady takes pity on us for the sake of Christ, and gives us a room, else I don’t know how I should manage to get along.”

Avdeich sighed, and said, “Haven’t you any warm clothes?”

“Now is the time, friend, to wear warm clothes; but yesterday I pawned my last shawl for a twenty-kopek piece.”

The woman came to the bed, and took the child; and Avdeich rose, went to the little wall, and succeeded in finding an old coat.

“Now!” said he, “it is a poor thing, yet you may turn it to some use.”

The woman looked at the coat, looked at the old man! she took the coat, and burst into tears: and Avdeich turned away his head; crawling under the bed, he pushed out a little trunk, rummaged in it, and sat down again opposite the woman.

And the woman said, “May Christ bless you, little grandfather! He must have sent me Himself to your window. My little child would have frozen to death. When I started out, it was warm, but now it is terribly cold. And He, Little Father, led you to look through the window, and take pity on me, an unfortunate.”

Avdeich smiled, and said, “Indeed, He did that! I have been looking through the window, my good woman, not without cause.” And Martin told the soldier’s wife his dream, and how he heard the voice—how the Lord promised to come and see him that day.

“All things are possible,” said the woman. She rose, put on the coat, wrapped up her little child in it; and, as she started to take leave, she thanked Avdeich again.

“Take this, for Christ’s sake,” said Avdeich, giving her a twenty-kopek piece, “redeem your shawl.” She made the sign of the cross. Avdeich made the sign of the cross, and went with her to the door.

The woman left. Avdeich ate some soup, washed some dishes, and sat down again to work. While he worked he still remembered the window: when the window grew darker, he immediately looked out to see who was passing by. Both acquaintances and strangers passed by, and there was nothing out of the ordinary.

But here Avdeich saw that an old apple-woman had stopped right in front of his window. She carried a basket with apples. Only a few were left, as she had nearly sold them all out; and over her shoulder she had a bag full of chips. She must have gathered them up in some new building, and was on her way home. One could see that the bag was heavy on her shoulder: she wanted to shift it to the other shoulder. So she lowered the bag upon the sidewalk, stood the basket with the apples on a little post, and began to shake down the splinters in the bag. And while she was shaking her bag, a little boy in a torn cap came along, picked up an apple from the basket, and was about to make his escape; but the old woman noticed it, turned around, and caught the youngster by his sleeve. The little boy began to struggle, tried to tear himself away; but the old woman grasped him with both hands, knocked off his cap, and caught him by the hair.

The little boy was screaming, the old woman was scolding. Avdeich lost no time in putting away his awl; he threw it upon the floor, sprang to the door—he even stumbled on the stairs, and dropped his eyeglasses—and rushed out into the street.

The old woman was pulling the youngster by his hair, and was scolding, and threatening to take him to the policeman: the youngster defended himself, and denied the charge. “I did not take it,” he said: “what are you licking me for? Let go!” Avdeich tried to separate them. He took the boy by his arm, and said, “Let him go, Granny; forgive him, for Christ’s sake.”

“I’ll pay him out so that he won’t forget it for a year! I am going to take the little villain to the police.”

Avdeich began to entreat the old woman: “Let him go, Granny,” he said, “he will never do it again. Let him go, for Christ’s sake.”

The old woman let him loose: the boy tried to run, but Avdeich kept him back.

“Ask the Granny’s forgiveness,” he said, “and don’t ever do it again: I saw you taking the apple.”

With tears in his eyes, the boy began to ask forgiveness.

“Good! That’s right; and now, here’s an apple for you.” Avdeich got an apple from the basket, and gave it to the boy. “I will pay you for it, Granny,” he said to the old woman.

“You ruin them that way, the good-for-nothings,” said the woman. “He ought to be treated so that he would remember it for a whole week.”

“Eh, Granny, Granny,” said Avdeich, “that is right according to our judgment, but not according to God’s. If he is to be whipped for an apple, then what do we deserve for our sins?”

The old woman was silent.



Avdeich told her the parable of the ruler who forgave a debtor all that he owed him, and how the debtor went and began to choke one who owed him.

The old woman listened, and the boy stood listening.

“God has commanded us to forgive,” said Avdeich, “else we, too, may not be forgiven. All should be forgiven, and the thoughtless especially.”

The old woman shook her head, and sighed.

“That’s so,” said she; “but the trouble is that they are very much spoiled.”

“Then we who are older must teach them,” said Avdeich.

“That’s just what I say,” remarked the old woman. “I myself had seven of them—only one daughter is left.” And the old woman began to relate where and how she lived with her daughter, and how many grandchildren she had. “Here,” she says, “my strength is only so-so, and yet I have to work. I pity the youngsters—my grandchildren—how nice they are! No one gives me such a welcome as they do. Aksintka won’t go to anyone but me. ‘It’s Grandmother, dear Grandmother, darling Grandmother.’” And the old woman grew quite sentimental.

“Of course, it is a childish trick. God be with him,” said she, pointing to the boy.

The woman was just about to lift the bag upon her shoulder, when the boy ran up and said, “Let me carry it, Granny: it is on my way.”

The old woman nodded her head, and put the bag on the boy’s back.

Side by side they both passed along the street. And the old woman even forgot to ask Avdeich to pay for the apple.

Avdeich stood motionless, and kept gazing after them; and he heard them talking all the time as they walked away. After Avdeich saw them disappear, he returned to his room; he found his eyeglasses on the stairs—they were not broken; he picked up his awl, and sat down to work again.

After working a little while, it grew darker so that he could not see to sew: he saw the lamplighter passing by to light the street lamps.

“It must be time to make a light,” he thought to himself; so he fixed his little lamp, hung it up, and betook himself to work. He had one boot already finished; he turned it around, looked at it: “Well done.” He put away his tools, swept off the cuttings, cleared off the bristles and ends, took the lamp, put it on the table, and took down the Gospels from the shelf. He intended to open the book at the very place where he had yesterday put a piece of leather as a mark, but it happened to open at another place; and the moment Avdeich opened the Testament, he recollected his last night’s dream. And as soon as he remembered it, it seemed as though he heard someone stepping about behind him. Avdeich looked around, and saw—there, in the dark corner, it seemed as though people were standing: he was at a loss to know who they were. And a voice whispered in his ear, “**Martin—ah, Martin! Did you not recognize me?**”

“Who?” uttered Avdeich.

“**Me,**” replied the voice. “**It is I,**” and Stepanich stepped forth from the dark corner; he smiled, and like a little cloud faded away, and soon vanished.



“And this is I,” said the voice. From the dark corner stepped forth the woman with her child: the woman smiled, the child laughed, and they also vanished.

“And this is I,” continued the voice; both the old woman and the boy with the apple stepped forward; both smiled and vanished.

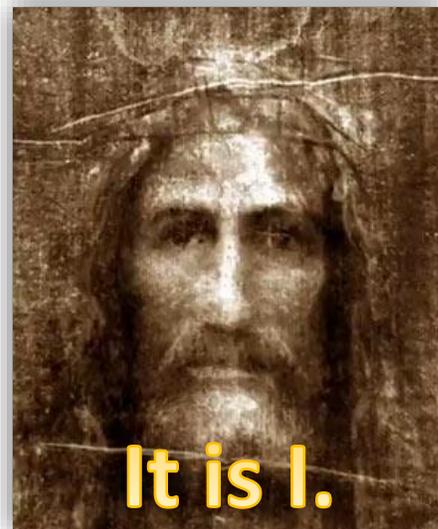
Avdeich’s soul rejoiced: he crossed himself, put on his eyeglasses, and began to read the Gospel where it happened to open. On the upper part of the page he read:

“For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in.”

And on the lower part of the page he read this:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25).

And Avdeich understood that his dream did not deceive him; that the Saviour really called upon him that day, and that he really received Him.



May we go and do likewise. Let your hearts be glad!

Dave

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know

O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

Week forty-seven: A New Song of Redemption

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seal, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Our limited minds can scarcely grasp the thought that Christ redeemed us with the purchase price of His own blood. The writer of Hebrews reminded us that it is "*not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption*" (9:12). Simon Peter elaborated on the point, saying, "*You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:18–19).

It is no wonder we will be singing this "new song" in heaven. Jesus alone is worthy to be the object of our worship. He is the only One who was slain and who redeemed us by His own blood. This verse reveals to us the hope of redemption as well as the scope of redemption.

THE HOPE OF REDEMPTION

Our hope of being redeemed is found in Christ and in Christ alone. As Paul said, "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:7).

Redemption is the scarlet thread that is woven throughout the entire Bible. The word *redemption* comes from *agora*, the Greek word for "the marketplace." In its verb form in Revelation 5:9, the word indicates that Jesus Christ entered the marketplace and purchased us out of the market to be His very own. How much do you think you are worth to Him? What would He pay for you? Our redemption had a large price tag affixed. The cost was Christ's own blood.

In this fifth chapter of Revelation, we come upon one of the great worship experiences of all time. What is it that gives us access to Christ's presence in worship? Is it the observance of certain religious rituals, the adoration of certain images or icons? The Bible is explicit: it is the blood of the Lord Jesus that gives us access to His throne of worship, not only in the unfolding scene in Revelation, but also in our own private devotional time. Our only hope of redemption is in Christ and His shed blood.

THE SCOPE OF REDEMPTION

Who is covered by this purchase price? Is it only for those on one end of the economic or social spectrum? Is it only for those who look like we look and act like we act? The new song of heaven declares that the scope of God's redemption extends to "*every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*" Jesus reaches out to those in the most remote tribal regions of our world. His redemption knows no language barrier. It is for every tongue. And, yes, it is for every people and every nation.

I remember vividly the first time I ever saw this word *redemption*. I was about eight years of age, and I desperately wanted a new baseball glove. This was in the day before we used credit cards to the extent they are used today. Most of us use those plastic cards in order to earn points so that we can acquire certain goods or services without actually having to pay cash for them. Back in the "olden days," we had what was called "S&H Green Stamps." They served the same purpose. One day while browsing through my mother's catalog, I saw a genuine leather baseball glove that could be mine with two and a half books of Green Stamps. Thus, I persuaded my mom to let me have the Green Stamps she received from grocery

shopping, gasoline servicing, and the like. Finally, after a few months, I had licked and stuck enough Green Stamps into my books to acquire my glove.

One Saturday, my dad drove me to the south side of Fort Worth. We pulled into a parking lot adjacent to a large, white concrete block building. As we were walking into the building, I noted over the door the words “S&H Green Stamp Redemption Center.” I had never seen that word *redemption* before and had no idea what it meant. Upon entering the building, I approached the counter and laid out my two and a half books of Green Stamps along with the page of the catalog with the picture of the baseball glove. The lady began thumbing through each page. My heart started fluttering. What if I had skipped a page? Next, she disappeared into a back room. Minutes later she returned with a square box. She shoved it across the counter in my direction. I opened it and, sure enough, there was a genuine leather baseball glove inside.

I put it on my hand and started patting the pocket with my other fist. I did this all the way home. A teenager up the street had told me that I should put some linseed oil in the pocket, wrap a ball inside, and tie it off with a large rubber band at night to form the pocket. I think I actually slept with that glove the first several nights I had it. I redeemed that glove with two and a half books of S&H Green Stamps.

And so our dear Lord one day stepped up to redemption’s counter . . . for you. His Father sent Him. So down He came, past solar systems and constellations and through measureless space. Down still farther to become a helpless seed planted in the womb of a young virgin to grow for nine months. Down yet farther, to be born in the dung and filth of a Bethlehem stable. Then down even farther, to go about doing good, only to be beaten and mocked, spit upon and scorned, and to finally walk up to redemption’s counter. There He put down His own blood to redeem you. Why? So He could take you home with Him!

This is the message of the gospel. This is why we will one day join that celestial choir in singing a new song, “*You are worthy . . . for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*”

As you memorize this verse, meditate on the tremendous price our Lord paid to purchase you out of the marketplace and take you home with Him.

A joy-full CHRISTmas to you!