

Jesus Christ is my Lord and my God

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All glory to God!

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Jesus came into my life

Life's meaninglessness in my adolescence drove me to search for the truth. I wanted to get into contact with the living God. Deep down in my heart I heard a voice: "If you can't get into contact with God directly, there is Jesus as the mediator between God and man." As a result of this comment I bought myself a Bible and began to read the New Testament to find out how to get into contact with God through Jesus.

Of course God exists

Ever since my childhood I took it for granted that there was a God. At home nobody ever talked to me about God or Jesus. Yet almost every night I prayed a formal prayer. This was most likely influenced by my grandmother. Two of her stories made a strong impact on me when under school age.

She told me about her mother, whom she considered a true believer. When she died there were two people beside her bed and they heard heavenly music and singing at the very moment of her death. They both thought that the other heard nothing but when they afterwards discussed they realized that they both had heard the same. The house was in the middle of a forest and in those days there wasn't even a radio in the house.

The other story was about three men who went into a barn to find shelter during a thunderstorm. Two of them began to mock God but the third warned them and didn't want to take any part in their mocking. And a lightning struck the barn and the two mockers were killed but the one who feared God was saved.

Religious youth

In a way I was proud of my respecting God by confessing His existence. In the middle of the lusts of puberty I became distressed by me own evilness and the wickedness of the world. When repeating my prayer in the evenings, a thought came to me that could God really speak to me. I just kept on speaking myself not even expecting an answer. I tried to pray even more fervently but the silence was deep.

Once again I was in anguish over not really knowing God in whose existence I claimed to believe. Then I heard deep down in me this comment: "If you can't get into contact with God directly, there is Jesus as the mediator between God and man." I then didn't know that the sentence was almost directly from the Bible (1Tim.2:5). This experience made me so excited that I went to a bookshop and bought myself a Bible. I decided to find out about Jesus. I also bought a notebook to write down my notions about Him.

Reading the Bible

When I was reading the Bible I was especially impressed by those passages where there came a voice from the Heaven declaring about Jesus: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" I made the conclusion that God likes people who are like Jesus. I thought that God doesn't accept me if I'm not as good as Jesus. I began to observe what He is like. All the time I was comparing myself with Him. The more I read the sadder I became. He was unselfish and humble. I was proud and selfish. It became clear to me that God was not pleased with me.

Then I was deeply moved by Jesus' words: "Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." I understood that this meant that it pays to stay with Jesus although it would seem to lead to oppression and even death. I then stopped my reading at Jesus' death on the cross. I could not understand why this Jesus, with whom God was pleased, had to die in such a shameful way.

When I reached Paul's letter to the Romans I realized that He died to atone my sins. I realized that when I believe in Jesus God the Father will say of me, too: "This Erkki is my dear son with whom I am pleased - because of Jesus."

This experience was so assuring that my heart warmed to Jesus so that I made a covenant with Him on that day. An unexplainable feeling of happiness in my heart assured me that God now accepts me as His beloved one. I was 18 at that time. I didn't know any believers and the only Christianity I knew was the official Lutheran Church. I didn't even know the concept of "coming to the faith", although that was what had happened to me. The four evangelists

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John led me to receive Jesus as my own Saviour.

Jesus started His work in me

What has become of me? I'm not ready. I have not become perfect. The real salvation is still ahead. The work of Jesus in me is not yet finished. Receiving the truth of the gospel was the first experience. It gave me knowing Jesus and peace with God. He called me and I had the mercy to answer Him in the affirmative already in my youth. How interesting it is to be taught by Jesus on the way to the eternal Kingdom of God!

My first experiences in the company of Jesus

In the beginning I had no fellowship with believers because I had become a believer by reading the Bible at home. I was wondering where others who belong to Jesus are.

Missing congregation

I told my best friend, Risto that now I believed in Jesus. He opposed my faith and expressed difficult questions. I opened my mouth and spoke out something on behalf of God and I noticed that I myself listened to my own answers in surprise. It was encouraging to experience that I am not alone but Jesus is with me.

When I came to faith in 1969 I was in the second class of the secondary school. I confessed my faith to my teacher of the Finnish language in my compositions. When she gave us the subjects about which we should write, she always gave also one religious subject. I have stored my composition that I wrote in 1970 about the subject "Is God needed?" In that I wrote inter alia as follows.

"Many people also believe in God, because they need a lord for themselves who is more powerful than they themselves. However is their God the real and the true God? Every one of them should inspect that in the light of revelations of God. Which revelation is right? The revelation of the real historical person, who doesn't accept praise from men for himself, is right, isn't it? Really, exalting self to be almighty is the reason that generally is preventing men from believing God. If a person, who doesn't accept honor to himself but gives it to God, is radiating divine power that can be noticed to have reviving effect, his message can be considered right. I think that Jesus Christ is such like person. I believe in Him because I need Him. I need Him because He can forgive me my sins."

In the same class there was Olli whom I considered a genuine Christian. I told him about my faith and he asked me to come to the youth meetings of the Lutheran Church of Keski-Lahti, which he himself attended. Once I visited there. I didn't attend another time because I felt that they are not for me.

I started to read the Bible in order to compare the Lutheran Church with the Church mentioned in the Bible. This was the first serious test to my faith. I was terrified at how far the Lutheran Church is from the Bible's Church. I thought that is it true at all what is said in the Bible, if the Church described there doesn't exist.

At that time I had the same kind of dreams in many nights. I saw a big church building that's tower looked frightening high. The whole building was massive like a large monster. After it I saw a man near the door of the building who beckoned to me to come in. I was frightened and escaped away.

This dream was repeated in many nights with little differences. Finally I had a dream where I was alone in a forest crying for the church doesn't exist. When I was weeping I heard joyful voices of discussing people which were coming to me. When I lifted up my head I saw people coming towards me and I had a feeling that they were discussing joyfully with each other because they loved Jesus.

I wondered where they were coming from. More distant I saw a low building that's walls were like transparent glass shining yellowish light. Inside it through the walls I saw people whom I understood to be believers. After this I didn't see any more these dreams. Then I didn't understand the meaning of these dreams. However now I understand how they portended for my future experiences about the church.

Over two years passed from the time I came to faith before I started to attend meetings of believers. Even so I was not without teaching during those years but the Holy Spirit taught me how to follow Jesus in my daily life.

What does it mean in practice to live with Jesus? There are many questions. I understood that from the Bible came up the principle that I must not do what I believe that Jesus would not do. I don't need to sin but I am allowed to do the will of God. As long as I want to follow Jesus in everything I can live in a good conscience, although I sometimes would fall in sin. He who wants to sin, doesn't know God.

In army

Soon after coming to faith I had to go to the army. Jesus commanded to love enemies, not to kill them. I understood that He wants that I refuse to enter military service. However I was afraid to take that step. I started to read books in order to justify my fear.

At that time I was a member of the Lutheran Church of Keski-Lahti as an inheritance of my parents. I read a book where was the official explanation of the Lutheran Church why a Christian should enter military service. The book was made by a committee that's chairman had been the then vicar of the church of Keski-Lahti, Pertti Ranta. By appealing to this book I decided to go to the army. It even happened to be so that my conscription was in the hall of the same church and even the mentioned vicar gave a speech there. God also commands to obey religious leaders. Because of this word I decided to try to be a good soldier in honor of God. However, in this way I obeyed more man than God, which was about to destroy me.

My service in the killer school of Vekaranjärvi (from October 1971 to September 1972) was a great shock to me. I had never before felt any so great presence of evilness. I had not even been able to imagine that something like that could exist. My conscience testified against me that I had broken my covenant with Jesus. However I had no power to confess my faith and ask to get away from the military service.

After the recruit time I was commanded to the reserve NCO officer school of Kouvola. There I was surprised when I was the first one who was appointed the pupil warrant officer. It was a strange experience to command 220 men and they marched on my command. Even so the purity and brightness of Jesus were often in my mind. I was ashamed of myself and I felt to be a great coward when I didn't dare to follow Jesus.

When my work as the pupil officer was over I decided to offer myself as a giver of evening prayers. I thought in that way to confess my faith in Jesus, although I had the guilty conscience. When I had been a pupil warrant officer I got used to stay before

men. Obviously therefore I didn't dare to step before them to speak a devotional speech.

My devotional speech was a shock for many, which appeared from the later discussions in my squad room. Although I felt relief when I managed to confess my faith in Jesus to them, on the other hand my conscience testified against me that I am a pretender. My inner conflict became worse and worse. I refused to go to the Reserve Officer School and returned Vekaranjärvi to train recruits.

While teaching others how to kill I felt I was losing all my hope. I understood that I am a backslider. I was considering, am I like Peter whose heart was broken after he denied Jesus, or am I like Judas whose heart became harder and harder.

When I was longing for the return to the fellowship of Jesus I had a nervous breakdown. During one night when we were practicing in a forest I decided to go away. "I go away!" Outside the tent I put down my gun and all my equipments and also my stripes of lance corporal and started to walk to the nightly forest without any other destination than the presence of Jesus.

Finally I went my home, to Lahti. I went to the working place of my veteran father, because I had no key of our home. When I tried to speak to him I couldn't but I burst into tears. He took me a military hospital. The psychiatrist didn't want to discuss my bad conscience with me, but he said that he would send me back to service in Vekaranjärvi and write a paper which would prevent my superior from punishing me.

During that time I fell in love with a girl. She was a nurse in the military hospital where I had been a while. Actually I searched in her comfort to my agony. However my pain became worse when it became clear to me that she was not interested in me.

In previous night before the day I had to go back to Vekaranjärvi I sat on a bench of a park and were deeply distressed. I wanted to stop the time, because I didn't want to meet the next day. When I was thinking about it I broke my wrist watch. I considered making a suicide. In that moment I felt as if God had looked at me from

His heaven. I realized that I can escape God nowhere. I was calmed down, and I thought that maybe I still have a hope.

When I had come back to my unit I told to the company commander that I escaped because I couldn't endure my bad conscience. He said to me: "When I was young, I also had principles. When I noticed that I cannot follow them I gave them up." I didn't want to give up, but I had no strength to follow Jesus.

I was transferred to the staff company where I finished my military service under great anxiety. I thought that God had deserted me. I managed to be many weeks without signing for a gun. When my commander noticed it, he ordered me to fetch a gun. However in practice I did nothing with it. I was made the caretaker of the shooting range.

One day my anxiety grew so great that I went to speak to the commander of the company and said that I refused to continue my service. He sent me to a judicial officer. I expected that he would arrest me. When he heard that I had been under the psychiatrist's care in Lahti, he sent me to the military hospital of Kouvola. There they only put me lying in bed and once a surgeon discussed with me my varicose veins and at the same time my distress. He said that he doesn't dare to operate my veins, because is afraid of my distress would cause that I will not come out of anesthesia.

From the hospital I returned Vekaranjärvi and finished my service without a greater anxiety. I was even promoted to corporal. I was on vacation when we had to give away our guns and so I didn't need to touch my gun even then. My fellow soldiers told me: "The barrel of your gun was badly rusty, but you don't need to pay for it."

Guidance to congregations

I got back to Civvy Street on 09.09.1972 and moved immediately to study in Turku. Then I prayed Jesus and said to Him that it was my sin that I had not loved Him. Then I heard when He said to me: "Although you have not loved me, however I have loved you and atoned your sins." His attitude broke my heart and I was allowed to weep like Peter for that I had denied Him by my deeds.

Jesus' mercy encouraged me so much that I decided to get in contact with believers. I said to Jesus: Now I don't select a meeting where I will go, but for your sake I will go to the first Christian meeting that I find in the newspaper. It was the Bible study of the Evangelical Lutheran Student Mission. In that meeting there were no other participants than the leader of the study and I. Later I came to know Ilkka in those meetings.

Once Ilkka and I stood discussing with each other near the Aura Bridge. Then Pauli was walking past us. I knew him as a friend of my brother. He told us that he had recently come to faith at his home. Just before he met us he had on the road prayed Jesus to show where other believers of Jesus are.

Together with Ilkka and Pauli I attended many Christian meetings. Also we, the three were gathered together and prayed and discussed the word of the Bible.

I was still restless because of my one-sided love affair and I suffered from the memories of the killer school. I was longing for the moment when Jesus would heal me. Although I had got friends, they were not able to give me what I hungered for.

Revelation of Jesus

It was January in 1973. For over two weeks I lulled myself to sleep by praying only one word, Jesus, Jesus... When I awoke in the morning, first I cried Jesus and lastly in the evening I did the same. I was studying in the University of Turku. One day when I came back to my residence I fell down to my knees beside my bed. Then He was there.

I felt His power and presence and I saw a revelation of the crucified Jesus on the cross. Actually I saw sharply only His eyes, which looked at me loving and broken by pain. He said to me: "You are now suffering for the sake of your own sins, but look at me how much more I have suffered for your sins." All my agony went away in the moment. Although I was able to see nothing anymore I felt that the same Jesus, who had been once on the cross for my sake, was now near me. I reached out my hand to Him and He said to me: "You are mine, forever."

This experience shook my soul totally. This was a much greater experience than the one when I came to faith. This event also released me from my desperate longing for the girl that I had fallen in love with. Also she was released from me. I was so happy with my Jesus. The presence of Jesus gave me greater happiness than the presence of the woman who I was fallen in love.

Also the anxiety caused by my army experiences vanished away. Then I understood why I had not had strength to follow Jesus in the gun issue. Because I had only vaguely experienced the love of God that He showed us in the cross, I were powerless to follow Jesus.

Soon after this a believer gave me the book of Watchman Nee named "The Normal Christian Life". Then I remembered how the first believer I knew, Olli, had once told me about Nee. It is my first Christian book that I have read. When I had read the book I felt that it was a guidance of God, because it did so good to my faith.

Path Of Life -73

It was not enough for me to attend the meetings of the Evangelical Lutheran Student Mission but I also attended the meetings of the Student Mission of the National Bible Society. From those meetings we also went to give our testimony to the campus. We approached them by doing the study of religiousness. I did this work because I was eager to speak about Jesus. I also attended their course of the personal evangelism.

In spring 1973 there was an evangelizing event, "the Path of Life -73" in Turku, which was arranged by the National Bible Society together with Lutheran congregations. The main speaker of the event was American Bill Yoder. Also home evangelism was included in the campaign and I attended that work. We went to doors and discussed Jesus. There were training events for this work. In those meetings I saw my future wife for the first time. She acted as an interpreter of Bill Yoder.

At that time I got to know many who belong to Jesus and they acted in different Christian organizations. Then I learnt to recognize the members of Jesus by it that they showed their love to Jesus. Then I also learnt to undervalue the membership of their Christian organization.

At that time I also experienced for the first time how many want to recognize the members of the church by it that they love the same organization. A pastor of the Student Mission didn't like it that I didn't bind myself to his organization. He said to me: "Be not ashamed of your spiritual home!" I was embarrassed by that. Our home is there where the people who are dear to us are. I was at home with all who only brought out their love to Jesus.

Baptism in the Spirit

Ilkka spoke in tongues and his example inspired me to seek the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. I had just met Jesus but I thirsted for Him more. So I prayed to Him to baptize me with the Holy Spirit as He had promised. I thanked Jesus in the faith that He will give me the baptism in the Spirit, because I knew that He never breaks His word. Nothing seemed to be happen, but I felt that He was near me.

Once when I had spoken to Jesus till my heart was empty, I said finally: "Then I have not yet received the baptism in the Holy Spirit." Then it happened. My prayer continued by speaking in tongues. I was again home alone. Many had prayed for me in the meetings, but it seemed to be so that God preferred to meet me in solitude. After this experience the word of the Bible started to open up for me better than ever before.

Baptism in Water

I got married on 18.8.1973. In that autumn my wife said to me that she had understood that God wants that she takes the baptism in water. I felt a strange wave of hate coming over me. What was that? Maybe it was sharing in the spirit of Lutheranism. I was quiet and studied my attitudes. I wondered why I got angry.

I studied the baptism from the Bible. I deliberated about the matter and prayed God. Then Jesus reminded me of my experiences in army and of the reason why I had been disobedient to God. He who trusts in himself denies his Lord and trusts in a sword like Peter. When I take a baptism in water I confess to God that I do not trust in myself, but Him. When I dedicate myself to the same kind of death with Jesus, I trust that God who raised Jesus from the dead

will give also me an ability and power to live according to the will of God.

I was baptized together with my wife in autumn 1973 in the Baptist Church of Turku. Then we also left the membership of the Lutheran Church. When we were baptized we were not demanded to become the members of the Baptist congregation of Turku. Thus we were baptized into Jesus Christ and not to be Baptists. A little later we voluntarily joined this Christian community. We left its membership in 1979.

He is so wonderful

Here are condensed the features of God and Jesus Christ of the Bible into the few sentences. The content of all sentences of this presentation are in the Bible. Only the way of expression is changed.

He is the wonderful God

He is only God. He is one. He is a harmonious whole. He is good. He is eternal and unchangeable. He is not a part of any creation. He has created all that exists in this world and in the invisible one.

He is the Spirit with rich thoughts. He is the Word, perfect in order and powerful in faith. He is the handy Creator, the master in his deeds. He is compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

He maintains love to thousands, and forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He doesn't leave the guilty unpunished, but gains the atonement to him. He doesn't tolerate evil, but hates it ardently. Our evil deeds have kindled his anger. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from Him and gathered into the eternal fire lake.

He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. Yet He judges each man's work impartially. He doesn't cancel his words, but keeps all his promises, whether it is a promise of blessing or judgement.

He loved the world by becoming a man, Jesus Christ. He is truth. He is love. He is life.

He demonstrated his love for us in this: He put the punishment of sinners on innocent Jesus so gaining the atonement to the whole world. He raised Jesus from the dead and will give the resurrection to the whole creation.

He is the God of the atonement and the salvation. He saves the one who believes in Jesus. He purifies from sin the heavens and earth. He will make everything new. The river of the life's water flows from Him. It heals and makes alive those who were reconciled.

Heaven is there where He is. Those, who hate Him, love death. Those, who love Him, hate evil. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. To His name be praise!

He is a wonderful man

Who is like Him? He is not angry with his brother. He doesn't despise anyone. He doesn't covet anyone's property. He doesn't look at a woman lustfully. He doesn't swear at all. He doesn't give a solemn oath, because His 'yes' means 'yes' and His 'no' means 'no'. He never lies. All His words are true.

He doesn't repay evil with evil or insult with insult. If someone strikes Him on the right cheek, He turns to him the other also. If someone wants to sue Him and take his property, He lets him have some more valuable property as well.

He gives to the one who asks Him. He doesn't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from Him. He lends without expecting to get anything back. He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

He loves his enemies and does good to them, who hate Him. He blesses them who curse Him and prays for those who ill-treat Him. He is merciful. He doesn't talk uncharitably to those who have done wrong deeds, but he restores them gently.

He is patient. He is kind. He doesn't envy. He doesn't boast. He is not proud. He is not rude. He is not self-seeking. He is not easily angered and He doesn't keep record of wrongs. He doesn't delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He is able to protect in every situation. He always trusts the whole truth. He doesn't lose his hope in any situation. He suffers all without complaints. Although all goodness on earth fails, He never fails. This man is Jesus Christ.

Life's meaninglessness in my adolescence drove me to search for the truth. I wanted to get into contact with the living God. Deep down in my heart I heard a voice: "If you can't get into contact with God directly, there is Jesus as the mediator between God and man." As a result of this comment I bought myself a Bible and began to read the New Testament to find out how to get into contact with God through Jesus.

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