
THE GREAT EXCHANGE

A Double Portion for Sin

Daniel A. Brown, PhD

God's interest is to transform broken and bruised people like you and me—blighted souls ravaged by incidents, accidents, and willfulness—not only by removing the damage, but also by doing us so much good that we end up with a double portion of blessing from His hand.

Most of the time, we live with shame for things we have done or that have been done to us. The guilt hangs about us like a low-pressure zone into which ominous clouds pour their depressing mix of wintry depression onto us because...well, it is true, we have done those things we shouldn't have done. Unspeakable acts have been staged upon our heart and with our body—not all of which were our choice, but the sullied refuse of those times have littered our souls, nonetheless, like discarded wrappers, smells and foodstuffs in a back-alley dumpster.

Even though we know we are forgiven (*kind of?*), we cannot escape the gnawing hunch that our soiled, used condition disqualifies us from really counting for much in the Lord. Regardless of the potential we used to have to become something of noble use in the Kingdom, we have blown it so badly, and have turned away—making intentional and deep-seated departures—from Jesus' instruction so many times that there cannot be any hope for our *future-that-was-His-plan*.

The best we can now imagine is that perhaps the Lord will at least accept us as His. Though our waywardness has denied Him, we pray that we are not yet to the point where He will deny knowing us.

We will even settle without complaint for being marginally accepted by the Lord. All thought of being delighted in or used meaningfully by Him vanished long ago, probably the fifteenth time we repeated a sin when our "*I-really-mean-it-this-time*" confession from the previous episode was barely off our tongue.

How like the prodigal son we are: we rehearse speeches and arguments in our mind that we hope will convince our Father of just how repulsed we are by our own behavior. Since we are without excuse for what has happened, we identify the least and lowliest point of continued connection we could possibly have in His household. We think we will please Him with our lowered aspirations about our *surely-by-now-forfeited* future.

GOD IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HAVE YOU HOME

But that does not please Him. What crazed and ill-conceived logic would make Him want to place His son in the servants' quarters, or keep him at a distance now that he has come all the way home? What has changed for the Father? Only one important detail that is so simple that the prodigal cannot see it:

“But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.” ~Luke 15:32

The Father has no need for rehearsed speeches; He doesn't engage in clever I-told-you-this-would-happen lines or lesson-teaching consequences. He says all He has to say with tears of joy and love-holding arms with which He embraces His son *just as he is*, with filth from the pigsty still clinging to his skin and rags.

Nothing in God's heart ever changes toward us—even when our go-it-alone choices have left us marked, stained and changed. The only change He orders is for our clothing—from filthy rags to festive robes. It is still true, don't you realize? Even after that first time when God exchanged your dirty garments, He joyfully does it again and again—as many times as necessary to affirm our identity as His child:

“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and was standing before the angel. He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ Again he said to him, ‘See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.’” ~Zechariah 3:3-4

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ~Isaiah 64:6

God wants to say to us, “Dear one, not only do I accept you, but I do far more than merely accept you. I delight in you, I love you, I choose *as-though-for-the-first-time* to use you for My purposes. It is never too late when you return to Me.” God knows you, and what He knows (*i.e.*, you), He likes.

He made you on purpose, and He (*still*) has high calling and destiny and significance for you no matter what mistakes or wrong choices you have made.

GOD CAN GIVE DOUBLE PORTION FOR YOUR SINS

I want to explore a fascinating theme in the Bible we call the great exchange or the great conversion. It is, as I have said, God's plan to recover you so completely that you become a marvel (*believe it or not*), a miracle sign for others to behold. The words Jesus read to announce the beginning of His earthly ministry, Isaiah 61:1-7, reference that plan to relieve the afflicted, heal the brokenhearted, free the bound, comfort the mourning, and send such restored/strengthened people to rebuild others. When that plan is in operation, people like you and me....

"...Will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God... Instead of (your) shame you will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation they (you) will shout for joy over their (your) portion. Therefore, they (you) will possess a double portion in the land, everlasting joy will be theirs (yours)." ~Isaiah 61:6, 7

A similar verse highlights the restorative ministry of Jesus—and how He chooses to convert us back to our intended condition, as opposed to cutting us off because of the condition we are in:

"A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice." ~Isaiah 42:3

When God sees a bruised reed (*one that has been bent or knocked over, perhaps somebody stepped on it or it was smashed by a boat*), He doesn't say, "That is just so ugly; let's just pull the whole thing out!" He won't stub out the barely-aglow candle that used to be in full flame, but now only smolders and smokes from one edge of the wick where a fleeting ember is fast losing its life. The Lord doesn't say, "Oh I hate it when they smoke like that." A smoldering wick He does not extinguish (Matthew 12:20).

He does not scorn your bruised condition. Neither does He despise the brokenness of your life, your mind, or your heart. Indisputably, a flame once burned—the fiery passion to serve Him or the radiance of what He meant you to be—and now it has diminished and drawn back almost to nothingness. He doesn't look at that and say, "You have had your chance; there is nothing left for you. I am disgusted when candles dwindle the way that you have dwindled, so I am done with you!"

His ministry is to bruised and broken, battered, tormented, inadequate, impoverished places of your soul, and He brings them back to life. But He doesn't just fix what has been torn; He actually will give you a double portion of good for all of the wrong you bring to Him from your life.

GOD IS PLEASED TO CONVERT EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE

Whenever I read this passage, I think of airports all over the world. I spend a lot of time in airports, and while I cannot tell you much about the countryside in many nations, if you put me in an airport I can identify which one it is better than most people: “*Yeah, this is Schiphol in Holland.*” One of the things I regularly do at airports is exchange my money; I convert my currency.

This is what God offers us: “*the great conversion.*” I go to what’s called the Exchange Bureau. Usually it has a counter, and a lady behind real thick glass. Even without knowing the language of the nation I’m in, the Exchange Bureau works very simply: I remove two \$100 bills from my wallet, and place them on the counter. My favorite place to do this is in Norway because it’s 7 kroner for every dollar. Once I have put the \$100 bills on the counter, the lady sweeps away the money like it’s no big deal, like she has done this several times before!

She puts them in a little drawer, pulls out some kroner notes, counts them out, and says, “*Oh, you get 1400 kroner: (minus the commission).*” Never mind that when I go to buy groceries, it costs me 600 of those 1400 kroner; for a few moments, I have in my hands a very impressive wad of cash. It’s no big deal to the lady on the other side of the glass. It’s very simple. And I can’t really buy much in Norway unless I exchange the currency.

This is exactly how it is in the kingdom of God. The Lord invites you to come and take all of the stuff out of your pockets that you would like to have exchanged—all the unrighteousness in your soul, all the wrong ways of doing and thinking, all of the sin. If you plop \$100 worth of sin up on the counter, the Lord will take that unrighteousness and sweep it away. Instead of putting it in a drawer, however, He throws it behind His back and it lands in the deepest part of the sea. He then counts out \$200 worth of righteousness, puts it up on the counter, and gives you an expectant look that says, “*It’s yours, take it!*”

THE HEAVENLY EXCHANGE RATE IS 2:1

It is the most incredible exchange rate in all of creation. The heavenly exchange rate is two for one, and you get two righteous bills for every one unrighteous bill that you place on the counter. You can’t beat it. The way that we think in our worldly mindset, the best that most of us hope for is just, “If I could just unload this money. If I could just get the unrighteousness out of my life! I don’t mind leaving here impoverished. At least I know I have cleaned out my wallet and pockets and I have left all of my junk there; praise the Lord that He forgives!”

And Amen—yes hallelujah! Praise the Lord that He does forgive, but that’s not the whole story. Try to envision this: you come and put your unrighteousness up on the counter, and you are glad that He sweeps it all away. You want to get away as quickly as you can so that no one will associate your

presence with that huge pile of unrighteous bills wadded and stacked there. You want to get away quickly, so you almost miss how He takes your pile all away and He puts up double the amount of righteousness. Can you hear a banging on the thick glass of the window while He is trying to catch your attention as you flee? He is saying, *“Hey! Come back! You are leaving without your righteousness!”*

GOD ENABLES YOU TO PLUNDER YOUR RAVAGERS

Exodus 12:35-36 is one of several other passages in the Bible where we observe this pattern of God wanting to give us bounty out of our bondage. He actually wants you to plunder those who have been plundering you. Out of an impoverished condition, He gives us riches. The nation of Israel, as you may know, is coming out of Egypt, leaving the land of their captivity and heading toward the Promised Land.

God says to them, “Not only are you going to get out of captivity, but on your way out when you are headed to the Promised Land, I am going to enable you to plunder the Egyptians and to take the articles of silver and gold and whatever it is that they’ve got. They are going to be so happy to get rid of you that they will give you any riches you desire. You will take that plunder into your future as a double portion from your captivity!”

When you get delivered, when the Lord brings revelation to your mind and your heart gets set free from something, your enemies that have kept you down begin to say, *“Hey man, just get out of here! Come on! Go, go, go—you are free!”*

Your God-intended response might go something like this: *“Yeah, I would really like to split, but I’ve got so much stuff I don’t think I can do it without your van.”*

“All right, well here, take my van and go!”

“Well yeah, but in addition to your van, I would like some of those stock options you’re always talking about.”

“Fine, here! They are yours!”

“...And I have really been admiring that gold piece on the mantle!”

“Fine, take it!”

We get enriched from the very setting where we have been held as slaves in captivity. That is God's signature on a great deliverance. He doesn't just enable us to cope with our bondage(s), He turns it/them around with a double portion. Where before you might have been a person with an extreme temper, after Jesus' deliverance in your life you have become someone who can hardly get bothered. Resentful people become gracious celebrators of others' blessings; bitter people become filled with contentment.

When the Lord has really delivered a person out of some situation, they almost always end up with a quality of increased spiritual wealth. There will be a sparkle about them, something that cause you to think they are richer now than they were before. It is very difficult to put into natural words, but when you do get freed, when you do get forgiven, you are enriched in a way that turns hearts noticeably in your direction. The truth of your testimony is remarkable to others.

My point in saying all of this is that it does not matter to what extent you and I have made wrong choices. It is not about the past that we'll never be able to escape. No. We serve a God who is alive. We serve a God who is real. We serve a God who is a miracle worker; He takes your former poverty, your former sin and translates them, He exchanges them, converting them into a double portion.