

From Where I Sit . . .

“HE PAID A DEBT HE DID NOT OWE”

I read once about a school in the backwoods of the northeast. It was a logging community. The kids went to school only until they were old enough to work in the logging yards. This was typically about 13 years old. Even the girls were tough in this school, but you had to be in order to survive in this harsh country. Because of that, the school children continued to run off one teacher after another. The school board posted an advertisement in the regional paper and one old man responded. When he went to the school, the board laughed and said he would not last a day. But since no one else applied for the job, they gave him a try.

The old gentleman was smaller than most of the children, yet he was wise. On the first day of class he explained to the children their need for a teacher. He explained that he could not keep order and discipline in the class, but that they could. If they worked together, he could teach and they could learn. The old man had the children make a list of rules and with each rule came a punishment. At this school the punishment was licks with a bullwhip. To the amazement of the entire community, weeks went by without a single rule being broken.

Yet the dreaded day finally arrived as Big John reported that his lunch had been stolen. The teacher again explained the need for discipline and stressed with each rule there was a punishment. He then asked the class who had stolen the lunch. Out of the middle of the class, up stood Timmy, the smallest boy in the class. With his head bowed low, Timmy admitted stealing Big John’s lunch. As his voice shook he explained the reason he had stolen the lunch. He had not eaten in 3 days. He said his dad had been hurt two weeks ago and he couldn’t work. His dad was too proud to ask for help. Everyone was silent and the mood was heavy as they all knew Timmy could never stand the 5 licks with the bullwhip. As the tears ran silently down his face, he slowly began to walk to the front of the class.

All at once, from the back of the room, Big John stood up and walked down the aisle and pulled Timmy back to his seat. He explained that he would take the beating for Timmy even though it was his lunch that had been stolen and even though he had no guilt in this matter. He took the punishment because his heart was now full of compassion and he knew there was no way Timmy could bear the stripes for his own crime.

This story reminds us of another in history who stepped in front of those who deserved to die as penalty for their crimes. You see, you and I have a Savior who died for us on the cross even though He did not deserve to – even though he had no guilt. He sacrificed much more than Big John did, for Jesus paid for our sins with His life’s blood.

You see, God demands that for every sin a sacrifice must be made. In the Old Testament it was the blood of bulls and goats. But now it’s Jesus who takes our place on the cross because we cannot pay the debt that sin requires. Christ’s death on the cross satisfied God’s demand for sacrifice, and as Christians we know it is only that blood which could cover all our sins---past, present, and future

He paid a debt He did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay.

I needed someone, to wash my sins away.

And now I sing a brand new song — Amazing Grace;

Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

However, we need to be reminded that Timmy had a choice to make when Big John came forward to take his place. He could accept the pardon so freely offered by his savior, or he could reject Big John’s sacrifice and try to bear the burden alone. In a similar way, it is now up to you and me whether we will accept the great sacrifice which Jesus made and turn our faces back to God. What will your answer be?

. . . Terry Broome

Printed in the *Broad Street Banner*, Volume XX, Number 17, April 27, 2005.