



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #10: "The Sanctuary in Heaven"

The Worth of a Picture

This generation can hardly function without pictures. We have pictures everywhere. We hang them on our walls, publish them in books, carry them in our wallets, watch them on television, and even put them on our driver's licenses. In spite of the fact that even the best picture can never replace the real thing, the old familiar adage that tells us that a picture is worth a thousand words is still true.

God understands this. Long ago He gave His people far more than just the written word. He gave them a picture of Jesus working out the plan that Heaven had devised to save us from sin.

As I read of the Jewish people that lived in the distant fog of Biblical history, I realize that they were not very different from us. They had many similar struggles. The stress of survival took its toll on their lives. They had financial difficulties. Illnesses and accidents came unexpectedly. Governments were corrupt. Loved ones died. The threat of war hung over their heads. Families broke up or lived together in miserable disharmony. They were sinners just like we are today.

We still face many of these same problems. There was one big difference however between their problems and ours. They had never heard the story of Jesus. He had not yet come, lived, suffered and died. All of this was yet future. They had not seen as clearly as we can how much sin cost Jesus and how deep was God's love for them. Therefore He gave them a picture of His love.

"A picture of His love?" you might ask. How could He give them a picture of His love? That is what our lesson is about today. We will learn how long, long ago God came down to the children of Israel and gave them a special picture of His plan to save them from sin. He had the people build a special building at first it was just a tent-that represented His headquarters in heaven where He was working for their salvation. They called this building the "Sanctuary." The Old Testament sanctuary was a picture of God's plan to save mankind through Jesus Christ. It explained every detail of His ministry.

Unfortunately, many of the people looked at the picture without comprehension. The picture told all about Jesus, but when Jesus came they did not recognize Him. They were like a person who is given a blueprint for a wonderful house that will be built, but when the house is finished, the untrained eye sees no similarity between that blueprint and the house.

More than that, the children of Israel came to trust in the blueprint itself. They didn't realize that, the sanctuary, like a blueprint was only valuable as it reminded them of God and told about His wonderful love to them. Imagine a home builder showing a prospective young couple a blueprint and saying, "This is the home I'm offering to you at a special price today. Just for today you can have it for only \$45,000." The drawing looks like it represents a very fine home, so the couple hands him over the \$45,000. After the builder has the money he hands the couple the blueprint and says, "Here is your home. Enjoy it!" The young couple protests, but the builder reminds them that he told them that, "This," pointing to the blueprint, "is the home I am offering you today for just \$45,000."

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"But," the young couple protests, "the blueprint is only representative of the home you are supposed to build us. When you said, 'This is the home I am offering you,' we thought you meant what the blueprint represents, not the blueprint itself"

Obviously, in the illustration above, the young couple was badly taken, but many of the children of Israel did just the same thing. They came to trust in the blueprint, instead of the Christ whom the blueprint pointed forward to.

Pictures and blueprints are only meant to be representatives of something else. Imagine with me a certain scenario which the Steps to Life Television Director told about on the Steps to Life television program not long ago.,

The year is 1968. The Viet Nam war is in full swing and Jim has just gotten his draft notice. After basic training and AIT he gets a 12 month assignment to Viet Nam with a thirty day leave beforehand. During his home leave he spends every moment he can with his new and lovely bride. Finally, before leaving, he takes her to a studio to have a portrait made of her. He wants the best wallet picture possible to carry with him everywhere he might go.

Tenderly Jim holds his bride upon his final departure and promises to always remain true to her. He tells her that her picture will be his greatest treasure and that it will always remind him of her,

He did as he had promised. Every morning he took her picture out and admired it. Every evening before retiring he looked at it again and renewed his affections for her. Her picture was his constant companion and greatest treasure while overseas. Through all the tensions and life-threatening situations of war, Jim never lost nor forgot his picture. The edges told of frequent handling. It became his solace and brought him peace. He guarded it with his life. Indeed, it became his life. It seemed it was the only thing worth living for. He showed it to all his buddies proudly saying, "This is my wife."

Jim was lucky. He made it through the war alive and soon he was on his way home again. As he flew over the Pacific Ocean he carefully pulled out his most prized possession. Lovingly he looked at the pretty smiling face and expressive eyes that had been his constant companion for so long.

Upon embarking in the United States again, he is met by the one the picture has been reminding him of for so long. She screams with joy as she runs to meet him. "Jim! Oh Jim!" she cries, "You made it!"

Imagine her surprise and sudden hurt when Jim pushes her away! "Who are you?" he inquires.

"I'm your wife," she cries.

"I'm sorry," Jim says, "you must be mistaken. I have my wife right here in my billfold. I don't need anything other than this picture! I've told all my buddies that this is my wife. This wife has stayed with me through all my loneliness and dangers of Viet Nam. This is my greatest treasure. I don't need you!"

Of course, Jim would be admitted for some psychiatric help, but in reality, that is exactly what the Jewish nation did when Jesus came down. The whole sanctuary service represented Him. It was a picture of His work and ministry. But they crucified Him and hung on to the picture!

The above story about Jim is only a parable to illustrate a point, but let me tell you a true story that happened to a dear friend of mine that is almost too preposterous to believe.

Fear gripped six year-old Millie's heart as she looked from her sister Gertie up into the eyes of the strange woman. What were they telling her? Things were happening so fast it was too much to comprehend. It seemed that the remnants of what little security her life had known up till now were being ripped from her.

Through a fog she heard their voices telling her that she must go with the "nice lady" now.

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"Everything will be alright," Gertie said. "They will take good care of you."

Thoughts raced through her mind so fast she could hardly pick which one to think. If only she had a mother to help her, but that was futile. Mother had drowned when Millie was only two.

She wanted to run to Dad. Certainly he would stop them and take care of her. But Dad was gone—they had taken him away—to prison!

The thought of leaving Gertie and her two brothers was almost unbearable. The future seemed so dark, so dreadful.

Gertie's voice pierced her thoughts. "Millie," she said, "before you go, I have something for you." In her hand she held a picture.

Millie took it and looked thoughtfully at the face of her dear daddy. It was a familiar one to her. She had often looked at that picture that had been taken of him shortly after his wedding nearly two decades before.

Gertie continued to talk, "Millie dear," she said, "Look at that picture every day. We don't want you to ever forget your dad. Someday you'll see him again. It will make him so happy to know his baby remembered him."

"You'll see him again! You'll see him again!" Over and over the words rang in her ears. The only good thing she'd heard for a long while. Of course she would look at the picture. Never need to worry about that! Not a chance that she could ever forget her dear daddy even if she didn't have his picture!

Millie clasped the treasure to her heart as she stumbled through her tears after the strange lady.

Life was never the same for Millie after that. Security was an unknown feeling to her. The numerous homes she lived in provided the basic necessities of life, but they could never fill the empty ache in her heart. At school, the kids taunted her about being a jailbird. Night after night her pillow was soaked with tears. No one heard or knew of her struggles but Jesus.

Faithfully she kept her promise to look at her daddy's picture. Every night before going to bed she spent time looking at it and longing for the time when she would see him again.

A popular song of the time went straight into her sad heart. It was a song of a little girl who wanted to go to visit her daddy in prison but had no money for the train fare. In the song, the conductor of the train asked her for her fare. After hearing her story he promised her she would never need a train fare while he was on the train. How she wished she were that little girl.

Thoughts of her dad were never far from her mind. When would she see him again? How would it happen? Was Gertie telling the truth when she said that, or was she just trying to soften the blow for her?

From the day she heard the promise, the hope burned in her heart. Whenever she walked the streets in town or found herself in a crowd, she found herself searching the face of every man she saw. Looking, looking, looking for the daddy in her memory. Looking for a face that matched the little picture she looked at every night.

As the years went by, Millie developed into a gentle, lovely young woman. She finally had the opportunity to be reunited with her brothers and her sister, Gertie. Time had eased some of the pain in her heart, but still she looked at her daddy's picture and wondered if she ever would see him again.

One day Gertie and some strangers came to visit Millie.

"Millie," Gertie said casually, "Do you know this man?"

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Millie glanced at him with the same quick discerning eye she had searched so many faces with for so many years. "No," she replied graciously, "I don't believe we've ever met."

Immediately she knew she'd said the wrong thing. Everyone's face wore a shocked, tense expression.

Embarrassed, she looked at Gertie.

"Millie!" Gertie remonstrated, "Don't you remember? Don't you know your dad!"

Color rushed to Millie's face and her ears seemed to be thundering as she realized what had just happened.

Embarrassment faded for a time while the long awaited reunion took place. The hope was replaced by reality. The picture was replaced by flesh and blood.

When Gertie and Millie were alone again they talked about the visit.

"Dad was so disappointed that you didn't know him, Millie," Gertie told her. "Didn't you remember him at all? Didn't you ever look at the picture?" she asked.

Well, no, I mean..... um, well, yes, I did look at his picture," Millie stammered. "But he was—well he was different than I expected." Millie slowly got out the picture and stared at it.

What had happened? As she gazed at it she began to see the resemblance between the young polished man in the picture and the older haggard man she had met today. Gertie came and looked over her little sister's shoulder at the picture Millie had memorized for so many years. As Gertie looked, understanding dawned upon her. Millie had been so young. She had probably not even noticed the changes 20 years had made between her father and the picture when she first received it. She had not thought of how the hard years he had just experienced would be written in the lines of his face.

The picture was good. The only problem was that humans change. Pictures don't.

Fortunately, God is not like that. When He gives us a picture of Himself and His ways, we never need to worry about the picture becoming obsolete. "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8.) When He gives us a picture, we can trust it.

You know, the strange thing was that even though God had given His people a picture and asked them to study it so that they would know Him, when He came they didn't recognize Him.

The people loved the picture, which in this case was the sanctuary and its sacrifices. They almost worshipped the picture. There was something about that picture that made them realize that their religion was superior to all others. As they worshipped in their temple, they recited the prayers that showed that they had not forgotten that the Messiah was coming and that they were longing to see Him. Faithfully they sought after Him as a nation that did righteousness. (See Isaiah 58: 1.)

But somehow-oddly, sadly-when He came, they didn't know Him. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." John 1: 11. They didn't want to recognize Him. As the evidence began to mount that His life matched the picture and the prophecies exactly, they saw that they would have to surrender their pride.

They saw that their prized possession, the temple, would not be all that important any more. They didn't realize it was only a miniature replica of a more glorious sanctuary in heaven. They clutched their picture to themselves and forgot the person that had made it important to them in the first place. They forgot that the law enshrined in the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary was a mere "copy" (Heb. 8:5) of the eternal law that even angels adore.

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They clung to the "shadow" (Heb. 8:5) and despised the one who loved them. They outwardly honored the law, etched in stone, but they rejected the Person with God's law etched in His flesh and blood-the One who said, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8, John 6:38.)

Today we cherish the sign of the cross. People wear it on necklaces and lapels. Homes have them on their walls. They are built on church steeples and walls. We sing about it and preach about it. Pictures of Jesus himself are multiplied. But friend, wouldn't it be awful if we were to make the same mistake as the Jews did and forget what that cross means to us personally?

We pray that as you study this lesson about the sanctuary that you will catch a new appreciation for the picture of Jesus, and through that picture understand His love a little better. May we never reject Him for the mere symbol or form of religion, but may we invite Him into our hearts every day.