

## **SOMETHING TO CHEW ON**

An old Papuan cannibal lay alone in a tiny grass hut in the steaming New Guinea jungle. He had been there for four days without food or water. He was unable to move and soon his sufferings would be over. Four days before, the people of his village had carried him to this lonely spot, built a rough shelter over him, and left him there to die. He was too old and sick and feeble for them to be bothered with him any longer, so they followed their age-old custom and removed him from among them. He accepted this treatment without any ill feeling. It was the way of his people.

In times past a missionary, Pastor White, had now and then visited his village. The old man had listened to the gospel story and learned about the God in heaven. He had felt that perhaps this God was better than the spirits whom he worshipped, but had never done anything about changing his ways. Now as he lay helpless and forsaken, during the terribly long, lonely, painful hours, he wished to see the missionary once more. The spirits he once worshipped gave him no comfort and he was afraid to die. He wanted to belong to the missionary's God and tried to pray to Him as he had heard Pastor White pray.

He asked God to send the missionary to help him. He did not worry over the fact that Pastor White knew nothing of his plight and that he could be anywhere on a walkabout, or that it would take days to reach him if he did know. In his simple faith he believed he would come, and he lay there and waited. About the time the man was carried from his village, in another village many miles away Pastor White made up his mind to go on a walkabout and visit the natives scattered throughout the area. He prepared for his journey, engaged some carriers, and took with him a young man called Bill who had recently come to the mission station. For six or eight hours each day they stumbled along a track of sorts which led up and down the rough, steep mountains till they were 6,000 feet above sea level. Still other mountains towered above them for another 3,000 feet.

The traveling was exceedingly hard. They had to wade through hundreds of streams and cross raging torrents. They tripped over roots and boulders in the tangle of undergrowth. They slipped and fell in the thick, sticky mud. Sometimes they fell down almost vertical slopes and then painfully dragged themselves up the opposite hillsides by clinging to whatever support they could find. They were soaked by tropical rainstorms and shivered in the gloom of the valleys where the sun never shone. Then they roasted on the hilltops and their clothes were plastered to their bodies with perspiration. They were bruised, scratched and bleeding and Bill's feet were covered with blisters. They were so weary that at times they could scarcely keep going.

But a few miles further on they hoped to reach a village (the sick man's village) and rest.

Presently the track divided. The three carriers who were ahead turned to the left, but when Bill reached the fork, he turned to the right. He didn't know why. He had never been there before and did not know the way to the village. It seemed to him as if some power compelled him to turn to the right. The surprised natives called to him to come

back. Then Pastor White called: "Hey, where are you going? Come back. That path doesn't lead anywhere. You will get lost if you keep going. We have to turn to the left. But Bill hurried on. He had to go on. Something was urging him forward. He simply couldn't turn back. His companion became alarmed. "Don't be silly. Come back," he called, then, he began to run after Bill, "Are you crazy? That is NOT the way. Come back".

Just then, by the side of the track, Bill saw a small leaf hut almost hidden by the undergrowth. He went over to it and parted the leaves on the roof. He peered through the hole and saw an old, wrinkled, filthy Papuan who looked like a skeleton, lying on the ground inside. The man raised his dull, red-rimmed eyes to the patch of light and tried to smile at the person looking in. But this time Pastor White had arrived. He took one look through the hole, then quickly crawled into the wretched, stinking little hut and bent over the dying man who tried to speak a few sentences.

"I have been waiting for you. I want to belong to your God - to - our - Father," he said as he remembered what the missionary had taught him long ago. The men made him a drink. Then in a few simple words they told him of God's love for him and of his wonderful heavenly Father who would receive him as His son. They comforted him and prayed with him. Soon his fears left him and he was filled with happiness. A while later the poor old man, with a smile on his face, died in the arms of the missionary.

Bill and Pastor White looked at each other. Now they understood why Bill had taken the right-hand track and why he couldn't turn back. They understood why Pastor White had decided to make the trip when he did. They felt that the days of toiling up and down the mountains had been well worth while and they thanked God that He had led them in time to the place where they were so urgently needed.

God is just as interested in each one of us as if there was not another person to claim His attention. It does not matter where we live or what is the colour of our skin. If we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, it makes no difference. Our Father in heaven knows all about us, and when we ask Him for help we know that He will answer our prayers just as readily as He answered those of the poor old man in New Guinea.

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In ancient times it was generally believed that people of rank and status should not soil their hands or stoop to manual labour. Work was an indignity, a disgrace to man. Work was the lot of a slave, a sign of social inferiority. The successful man was a gentleman of leisure.

All this Jesus revolutionized. He turned the social custom upside down. The Messiah was expected to be a prince and to arrive trailing clouds of glory; instead he came as a carpenter. The Greek word is tekton, one who could make not only a table, a chair, or a plow, but also one who could build a house, a boat, or a bridge.

When the Son of God appeared, he came not as monarch or statesman or military general. Rather he was just a lowly servant of his fellows. He introduced into the world a new idea of greatness, the greatness of self-forgetful service.

All the way to Jerusalem his followers bickered about status and awards. In the upper room not one of them would perform the humble, hygienic task that after a long hot journey had to be done. Jesus did what each one had refused to do. He laid aside his garments, took, a towel, poured water into a basin, and began to wash their feet. He had not come to be served but to serve.

In our culture, what type of person is held up for respect, almost for veneration? The successful person. Someone who has become wealthy and prominent. Those who have push and pull we treat with adulation. We are hypnotized by rank and social caste, by titled people and millionaires. The goal of ambition generally is to make money. The status-seeking urge is endemic in us. To be talked about, to be recognized, admired, fawned upon, these accomplishments are taken for greatness.

Jesus reversed all this. "It shall not be so among you," he said.

It was not status that he cared about, but self-denying service. In his eyes the badge of nobility was not prestige, but usefulness. He never asked about a man, How does he rate? or What is he worth? What he wanted to know was, Does he deny himself? Is he sensitive to human needs?

Over and over again his counsel to people was, Don't let your life revolve around your personal interests and ambitions; get out of your own light; escape from the prison of self; find yourself by losing yourself in a cause bigger than yourself.

This teaching was exemplified in the upper room - that immortal night when he gave Christians in every age both a charter of service and a symbol of true greatness: "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

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