

## God Sent Me

‡ Too close for comfort? (vv.3-4)

‡ Comforting to save lives (vv.5-8a,15)

In the name of Jesus, the Light of God's forgiveness, dear shining Christians:

Did you hear about the man supposedly saved by his I-phone? Buried in Haiti's earthquake, he downloaded an application for bandaging his head. Warned not to fall asleep, he set the alarm for every twenty minutes. Sixty-five hours later he was rescued. When the lost are saved, miracles defy reason.

Now imagine you were trapped three days alone thinking about your life. How many unkind words would you wish to reclaim? How many angry moments would you want to delete from your life? How many lustful thoughts or evil desires would you wish to erase before meeting the Almighty Judge? What a blessing that you and I can confidently examine our lives today in the light of God's grace. **God Sent Me** to point you to Christ for that last hour of your life and every moment until then. Carry God's Word in your heart and on your cell phone everywhere you go. Batteries may run out, but God's love will never die. It's a good thing, because sometimes under the rubble of our lives, doesn't it feel God is...

‡ Too close for comfort? (vv.3-4)

Both Old and New Testaments of the Bible describe God as "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12 :29). In one of the Bible's most comforting books, the questions still blaze: *The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"* (Isaiah 33:14 NIV) Can you sense how terrible Joseph's brothers felt?

Their earthquake was coming for 20+ years. Bad enough to suffer an ancient famine when dry clouds and hot wind kills crops for years on end. Only Egypt had food from stock piling during seven years of bumper crops. Everyone had to go to Egypt just to keep their families and stock alive. But these surviving sons of Joseph kept running into problems with the Egyptian official in charge of the food.

On the way back from their first trip they all found their money in their grain sacks. How could they buy more food if the official thought they were thieves? Worse yet, brother Simeon was in prison for crimes against the state. To prove they weren't spies, they could not come back without Benjamin. But Benjamin was the only son left of their father's favorite wife Rachel who died in childbirth with him. Twenty years before they had done something they never talked about. They sold Benjamin's brother, their half-brother Joseph, into slavery. Their lives were crumbling under the guilt of God's judgment.

Some people try to bury guilt, but sin will always find you out. Sin must be judged by God one way or another. The only question is when. In their terror these brothers did not realize that God was doing them a big favor, just as He is helping us today by letting us see through window of their lives.

Imagine the earthquake in their stomach to hear the Egyptian Prime Minister say, *"I am Joseph! Is my father still living?"* Two decades of tears they caused their father Jacob pretending Joseph was eaten by animals. Now terror blinded their eyes and tied their tongues. How do you react when the powerful man in flowing robes says, *"Come close to me"?* Again, we ask, *"Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"*

That's the pain of that favorite hymn, *Just as I Am without One Plea*. God's Law says I am condemned because of my sin. Hateful words are as sinful to God as hate crimes. But man's idea of love is truly hate in God's eyes. How can we see clearly unless God in His kindness also fills us with hope in the Gospel of forgiveness. *Just as I Am without One Plea But that thy blood was shed for me...."*

## † Comforting to save lives (vv.5-8a,15)

Like Jesus, Joseph bid his brother to come close. Then he reminded them, ***“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”*** Why? God tells us that by nature we are lost and condemned in sin even without the murder of abortion, or sins of fornication, adultery and homosexuality. Some people insist we should not remind anyone of sin. But that’s like saying your doctor should not diagnose a disease that’s fully treatable. God loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.

God wants us to appreciate His full and free forgiveness. But first God has to kill us before He can make us alive. He must tear down our self-righteous pride before He can build us up in grace. He must make us fear His wrath before we can cherish His mercy. He must help us see ourselves as beggars before God, so that in the end He can make us rich beyond earth for the lasting joys of heaven.

Joseph wasted no time getting to God’s mercy and grace: ***“Now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”***

Joseph knew his brothers had to feel bad before he could make them glad with the Good News of forgiveness. Through Joseph, God was **Comforting to save lives**. Joseph kept telling his brothers, “This was God’s doing. He used your sin to save our families from this dreadful famine. He could see it coming. We could not. Don’t feel bad; it wasn’t really you. **God Sent Me.**”

One of our favorite preachers has pointed out that “99.9% of our lives” are hidden from us.<sup>1</sup> But God opens picture windows into the lives of His ancient people to help us trust Him. Otherwise, His promises would only seem like theory. How could you truly understand that “all” means “all” if God did not let you learn by experience? ***“For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** (Romans 8:28) God’s saving plans for Jacob’s family convince us of the Lord’s promise: ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*** (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

The future looked bright because Joseph did not wait for his brothers to grovel before him. Instead, ***“he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.”*** Simeon was released. Benjamin was safe. Brother Joseph was still alive to help them. Father Jacob was soon in Egypt. Pharaoh’s court thrilled to learn their hero Joseph forgave his brothers.

How is it in your family? Have unkind words crumbled hope? Has hurt crushed your spirit? Are you weary waiting for others to feel sorry? Is your heart buried under suffocating guilt?

God wants to bandage your head with His forgiveness. He wants to set an alarm to keep you awake in crisis. He wants to download applications from His Word about God’s saving grace in the lives of real people. Jesus searched until He found us. He washed us clean with God’s forgiveness in the flood of His blood shed on the cross. God rescued us in Christ with Word and sacrament to heal us deep inside.

Use your fingers to see. Do you still have a body? Breath deep and say, “I have another day! A day to forgive as I’ve been forgiven. A day to give God’s grace away the way He gives it so freely to me. A day to stop waiting for others to feel sorry and forgive them from the heart.” Each memory is another opportunity to pray, “Lord, mercy them as you mercied me.” Let everyone feel your love like Joseph with his brothers. As Joseph said, ***“God Sent Me,”*** so our Lord Jesus says to you: ***“The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*** (Isaiah 61:1f; Luke 4:18) So it is written. So let it be. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> “Hard Times and God’s Plan,” a 2009 sermon by Pastor Don Patterson at [www.areasonforhope.net](http://www.areasonforhope.net).

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