

THAT INDELIBLE MARK

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“And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him” [Gen. 4:15]

An indelible mark is one that cannot be erased, no matter the cleansing agent used. I should know that because I once lost my favourite trousers to a New York subway bench stain. In my desperate bid to remove the stain, I tore the cloth! Can you imagine a similar mark on a human being?

*In **Gen. 4: 8-15**, we read the story of how Cain killed his brother, Abel. God cursed him for spilling innocent blood and turned him into a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth. Cain pleaded for leniency because the curse would make him a target for revenge killing. God answered his prayer by putting an indelible mark on him, adding, “whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” **[Gen. 4:15]**. That mark gave Cain an undeserved protection and privileges in the face of threats on his life. In spite of that, however, the world continued to see him as a murderer who deserved to die.*

*We are all like Cain “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” **[Rom. 3:23]**. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, all his descendants (who were still in his loins at the time) joined him in being driven from the presence of God. We became fugitives and vagabonds on the face of the earth. However, God loves us. So, to save us from eternal damnation, He sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place **[Jn 3:16]**, and by His stripes, we have been healed **[1 Pet. 2:24]**. His blood has become that indelible mark to seal our deliverance and warn off Satan and his evil agents that we are now the “apple of His eye” **[Deut. 32:10; Ps. 17:8]**, that we are “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” **[Rom. 8:37]**. But, will the world, dominated by the devil and his agents, back off? No way! Instead, that is the moment that they draw attention to our (now renounced) sinful past. Unfortunately, we could pay undue attention to what the people of the world say and think about us to our downfall **[Is. 51: 7-16]**.*

In today’s lesson, I shall use three simple examples from the Bible to illustrate this matter, an understanding of which is significant to our spiritual walk with Christ.

1. Three Simple Examples

(a) Simon the leper [Matt. 26: 6-13]

In Old Testament times, the law on lepers and leprosy was well spelt out. Here are the highlights:

- i. The leper was ceremonially unclean. Therefore, he was isolated and kept away from others [Lev. 13:46].
- ii. He was required to wear mourning clothes and to cry out “Unclean, unclean” so as to alert others to keep away for their own safety [Lev. 13:45].
- iii. A house in which there was leprosy was unclean and whoever ate in that house was also unclean [Lev. 14:47].
- iv. The leper’s re-absorption into society would depend on his complete healing, as pronounced by a priest [Lev. 13:17].

We saw how Miriam and Gehazi were treated when they had leprosy. For questioning Moses’ spiritual preeminence, God afflicted Miriam with leprosy. Even though Moses pleaded with God for his sister’s instant healing, she still had to be shut out of the camp for seven days [Num. 12: 4-15]. In the case of Gehazi, Elisha’s assistant, he deceptively obtained gifts from Naaman who had been miraculously cured of his leprosy. For his punishment, Naaman’s leprosy fell on Gehazi and his descendants “for ever” [2 Kgs 5:27]. There and then, he became disqualified to continue as Elisha’s servant. Therefore, leprosy was a serious social handicap.

In His time, we know that Jesus miraculously healed ten lepers whom He then referred to the priests, apparently to ceremonially re-integrate them to normal society [Lk 17:14]. However, we have no scriptural evidence that “Simon the leper” [Matt. 26:6] was one of the ten (could he have been the one who came back to thank Him?), or that he was ever healed by Jesus. No matter what, it was the same “Simon the leper” who gave Jesus a dinner to which was also invited Lazarus, the popular man raised from the dead by Jesus [Jn 12:2].

If “Simon the leper” could now give dinners, the following assumptions would be logical to make: he had had leprosy *in the past*, he had been isolated as required by Mosaic Law and, on his healing, had been so declared by the priests and ceremonially re-entered into normal society. So, even though he had been healed to the extent that he could now host Jesus Christ, the tar, “Simon the leper,” remained stamped on him by the world. Jesus saw his healing but *the world continued to see his disease*.

(b) Rahab the harlot [Josh. 2:1-21]

In preparation for the attack on Jericho, Joshua sent two spies on *reconnaissance*. On arrival there, they lodged with a woman named Rahab. We are not told why they went there but commonsense suggests that a public house (hotel or brothel) would be safer for strangers. The best place to hide is in the open! In searching for a serial killer, New York police would instinctively go first to the dark corners of the city before coming to Times Square.

With respect to Rahab, there appears to be enough evidence to infer that she had given up her sex trade *before* the spies came. For example:

- ❑ The people of Jericho had heard of how God had destroyed Egypt and brought the Israelites across the Red Sea by foot [Josh. 2:10].
- ❑ Consequently, she and her household had already accepted that “the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath” [Josh. 2:11].
- ❑ Her faith in this One and True God gave her the courage to risk her life by helping the two spies to escape and to return to Joshua.

This remarkable woman and her household were saved when Jericho was captured [Josh. 6:23]. She was taken to Israel where she married Salmon, the father of Boaz, the great grandfather of David [Matt. 1:5-6]. So, a woman that God has made an ancestor of Jesus Christ remains tarred as “the harlot” [Heb. 11:31]!

(c) The good thief [Lk 23:39-43]

Jesus was crucified between two thieves [Matt. 27: 38; Mk 15: 27], both of whom had been duly tried and found guilty for their crimes [Lk 23:41]. The one on His left joined those mocking Him, saying, “if Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us” [Lk 23:39]. However, his colleague on Jesus’ right rebuked him, saying, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss” [Lk 23: 40-41]. Then, he turned to Jesus and prayed, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom” and Jesus replied, “Verily I say unto thee, *today* shalt thou be with Me in Paradise” [Lk 23: 42-43].

By accepting Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, this *former* criminal obtained eternal salvation at the nick of time. His evil past had been wiped clean by the precious blood of Jesus. The former thief had become a saint, the first to enter Paradise under the new dispensation! Yet, Church tradition refers to him as the “Good Thief.” A good thief? What a contradiction! Why not recognize that he has become good? Why still call him a thief?

2. Lessons

We all find ourselves in a tough situation. We have given up our evil ways: drugs, prostitution, fraud, adultery, fornication, etc. We have confessed our sins and renounced Satan and his works. We believe that we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and that we are now new creatures [2 Cor. 5:17]. But, why do we keep being haunted by the world that keeps reminding us of our dead past? A very notorious bank robber, who had a reputation for breaking into any bank vault, was finally arrested, tried and jailed. In prison, he gave his life to Christ and renounced his old ways. Can you believe that a few years later, the state intelligence authorities came to seek his assistance on an espionage mission? His answer to them was very instructive: "I'm sorry, I don't know what you are talking about. The man you are asking for died five years ago!"

Many people commit suicide because nobody believes in them any more. Look at Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. We are told that "when he saw that Jesus had been condemned to death", he "repented himself and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, *I have sinned* in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" [Matt. 27:3-4]. What was their response? "What is that to us? See thou to that." How did he see to that? "He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed and went and *hanged himself*" [Matt. 27:4-5]. Many discouraged converts have committed spiritual suicide by backsliding. Depression and alcoholism have consumed some church ministers, husbands, wives or children who feel that the world around them has not accepted their repentance or apology.

When a woman caught in adultery was dragged before Jesus, He challenged her accusers, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" [Jn 8:7]. None of them could because "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" [1 Jn 1:8]. But, after her accusers had left, Jesus, the one who knew no sin, turned to her and said, "Neither do I condemn thee: *go and sin no more*" [Jn 8:11]. He focussed on her redeemed future, not her sinful past.

Let's take another example. After the risen Christ had struck Saul (Paul) blind on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, He instructed Ananias, one of the disciples in that city, to go and minister to Paul. Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints in Jerusalem and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name." But, after Jesus had explained to him Paul's conversion and God's ministry for him, Ananias went boldly to where Paul was staying and called him "Brother Saul" [Acts 9:10-17]. They smuggled him out of Damascus for his safety and, on arrival in Jerusalem, Barnabas, one of the rich members of the new flock, took him to the apostles who accepted him wholeheartedly [Acts 9:26-28]. See what such confidence in and acceptance of a former persecutor has done for the spread of the gospel.

3. Conclusion

God's indelible mark on Cain protected him against a vengeance-seeking world. Similarly, the indelible mark of the blood of Jesus has assured us of God's protection in this wicked world. Therefore, let nobody tar you with another indelible mark, the one of failure or disappointment or lack or sin. Don't again allow the devil, the accuser of the brethren [**Rev. 12: 10; Zech. 3:1**] to remind you of your past which the blood of Jesus has since stamped out for, in God's own words, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end" [**Jer. 29:11**].

On your part, don't help the devil to achieve his perennial purpose: to drag you back to hell. You do so when you occasionally leave the high road of holy living. "Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" [**1 Pet. 3:13**]. A just man may fall seven times and be able to rise again [**Prov. 24:16**]. The danger, however, is that, one day, he may fall and not have the opportunity to rise again [**Ezek. 3:20**]. May that indelible mark that people see on you be your new life in Christ rather than your old self of sin.