
THE PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

Michael Maw (approx. November 14, 2016)

One night during the Autumn of 2016, the Lord woke me suddenly in the early morning hours, and I looked ahead into the darkness and saw an object approaching me. As it drew nearer, I noticed that it appeared to be a picture held up by a painter's easel. It was a portrait of the face of Christ, and it was incredibly beautiful. It seemed to radiate glory and light. My eyes were fixated on this picture as it drew nearer to me, and the face of Jesus became clearer and clearer still. However, as it came closer I noticed that it was not just a picture, but a puzzle – a puzzle made up of countless pieces. It appeared to be a work in progress, as not all the pieces had been placed into the puzzle yet.

As I looked at the face of Christ, admiring His beauty, I was horrified to see several pieces start to fall out of the picture. As they fell off, they descended into what appeared to be a black velvet pouch attached to the bottom of the easel. More and more pieces kept falling out of the portrait. I looked, and saw that there were other pieces nearby that had not yet been placed into the puzzle. So, I stretched out my hand and took one and did my best to insert it into one of the vacant spots where a puzzle piece had previously fallen out. But it was no use – I could not make it fit into any one of those spots. The piece in my hand had its own spot elsewhere in the puzzle, but it could not take the place of another.

At that moment, I realized that I was not alone. To the right of the picture stood an angel clothed in light, which I could see out of the corner of my eye, although I was not permitted to look directly at him as my eyes were still focussed on Christ. I asked the angel, "Is there no replacement for the missing pieces? Why can I not use one of these other pieces to fill in the empty spaces?"

In a most solemn tone, he answered me, "No, those pieces cannot be replaced. That part of the glory of God shall never be seen now. Through endless ages it shall remain a mystery to all. It is an eternal loss."

I looked with deep sadness on those parts of the picture of Christ that now lay empty and was made to understand that each piece represented a man, a woman, or a child – created in the image of God. I cannot fully describe the incredible sense of loss I felt at that moment, that these precious souls for whom Christ died were lost forever. And that they alone could reflect a part of the glory and beauty of God that no other could reflect in the same way. Yet they would never fulfill this purpose.

I now realized the incredible worth of a human soul, and why God would have sent Christ to save even just one. Mankind, created in the image of God, was made to glorify his Creator, and to reveal to all of creation a clearer picture of the beautiful character of God. The loss of even one of us has eternal consequences. We

are His precious jewels – His sons and daughters – and were meant to shine like the stars forever. But many have now gone out, and the light that would have been revealed through them, no one will ever see.

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After this experience, I had a strong impression from the Lord to tell others about what He had shown me. However, I resisted this and began to have doubts. I questioned whether it was all true – whether I fully understood what had been revealed to me – and I indulged thoughts that perhaps it was only a regular dream and nothing more, though I knew this was not true. I was also fearful to tell others, especially the part about seeing an angel and talking with him. People would think I was crazy. As days passed by, however, the impression only grew stronger and I knew I could not resist the Lord forever.

“I will make a deal with you, Lord,” I said. “If these thoughts are really from you, then I’ll share this with others, but only as a children’s story... and only if I get asked to do a children’s story before the end of the year.” I felt a little bit like Gideon throwing out the fleece for the Lord. Since December was only a couple of weeks away, I was confident that I would not be asked. Chances were that all the slots for children’s story were already filled in. But I was wrong.

In December, I received a phone call. “Can you do children’s story at the end of the month?” I had to think fast. I panicked and made an excuse: “Sorry, we won’t be here that Sabbath.” After I hung up I told my wife, “Let’s go to another church at the end of December. Mark it in the calendar.” Now I had a valid reason. But here God had held up His end of the deal, and now I was backing out – like Jonah buying a one-way ticket to Tarshish.

The end of December approached, and I got another call. “Michael, would you be willing to do children’s story for January 7?” God doesn’t give up easily, and I felt a sense of guilt for trying His patience. “OK,” I reluctantly agreed.

Two days before I was to give children’s story, I panicked again. Early in the morning I was on my knees in the living room, pleading with God to let me out of our agreement. “I’m not ready, Lord. I just don’t feel like I fully understand what you showed me. How can I tell others about something I don’t fully grasp?” I was terribly nervous, but God was patient and merciful towards me.

As I knelt there praying earnestly, God at last spoke, “This is the story you will tell them instead”. And then, He put the idea for a new story in my mind – from start to finish. I saw a little boy holding a large bag of garbage, and blind-folded. He stood at the foot of a cross which was spanned horizontally over a deep, black abyss. He must walk on the cross to pass over the abyss, but this was impossible to do while blind-folded and holding the bag. At last he dropped the garbage bag of sin at the foot of a cross, and when he did this Jesus took the boy’s hands and led him along the cross. Though the boy’s feet faltered on the cross at times, Jesus was able to keep him from falling. And at last he reached the other side and fell into the Father’s arms, who was seated on His throne at the other end. I had my story. I built a cross, grabbed some garbage bags, and headed to church that Sabbath with a sigh of relief.

Time passed by and I was tempted to believe that God had forgotten my promise to Him. But no, God had a plan, and He was about to orchestrate special circumstances to convince me that what I had seen really was from Him.

On Wednesday, April 26, 2017, I woke up and got ready for work. I was running late, and after saying goodbye to my wife I rushed to get into my truck and head out. Immediately after leaving my house, a massive truck with an oversize load pulled out right in front of me. It drove slowly. Very slowly. I thought that perhaps it would turn off somewhere soon, and I could rush to work – but it did not. My patience was being tried, but the thought came to me, “Perhaps this is happening for a reason.”

Before leaving I had opened the AudioVerse app on my iPhone and continued listening to a sermon I had briefly started the previous day. The title of the sermon was “The Testimony of Anil Kanda”, a pastor and evangelist from California. There were 39 minutes of audio left to listen to. On an average day, it will take me almost exactly 30 minutes to get to work. Typically, when listening to sermons on my phone, if the sermon is almost done when I arrive at the office, I usually just delete it from my phone and listen to a new one the next day. I’ve heard the key points of the message, I think, and so missing the last 5 or 10 minutes won’t make much difference. God knew this, because He knows me very well.

By the time I was finally able to pass the truck with the oversize load, I had lost approximately 5-8 minutes off my usual commute time. I kept driving and listening. It was an interesting testimony. However, at exactly 49 minutes and 30 seconds into the sermon, at a section of audio that I would not have ended up listening to if it weren’t for that slow truck in front of me, God got my attention. I practically held my breath as I listened, not wanting to miss a single word. As my truck rolled into the parking lot and came to a stop, I just sat there awestruck, hardly believing what I was hearing. A chill ran up my spine. This was a Divine confirmation. I was meant to hear this.

These are the words of that sermon that I heard for the first time on April 26 (more than 5 months after my experience from God) in those last few minutes before I arrived at work...

“One day I walked into a church, I saw this unusual-looking mosaic. And I’m interested in art, so that’s interesting. Came a step closer and it was a mosaic of a face. Took a step closer, and it was a mosaic of Jesus. Took another step closer, and the little pieces that made up the face of Jesus were pictures of the church members. You see, friends, there is not another you. Did you know we have learned something about who God is from the life of Abraham? Do you know we have learned something about who God is from the life of Moses? From the life of Elijah? In other words, God is revealed through the lives of these people. We understand more about God. The Bible is a book of stories, individual stories, and it’s the compilation of all these stories that we have this picture of God emerging. But friends I want you to understand something. When you are not in Heaven, there is a part of God that will not be seen. There is a part of God that will be missing. Sure enough I believe that, you know, what we’ll have obviously will satisfy us throughout eternity. But when God works in someone’s life, there’s this angle or perspective of the beauty and glory of God that’s revealed that cannot be revealed in another person’s life. God through that individual. Friends, Heaven is worth it. Amen. Heaven is worth it and God will see us there if we trust and say, ‘Lord, today at this moment

I'm giving you everything again. I'm laying it down. Surrendering. Just putting it out to the Lord. You lead me step by step." (**AudioVerse – "The Testimony of Anil Kanda" GYC Southwest – Sept 4, 2016**)

Do you see how that would have gotten my attention? It's the same object lesson. The same message. After I heard that, I told God, "Alright, You win. I'll do it – I'll tell them." Then something else incredible happened. That very morning, only an hour or so later, I got a call from my pastor. "Michael, would you be willing to do a sermon for church?" Never in my life had I been asked to give a sermon at my church, until that year. I had to smile. God has impeccable timing.

On June 10, 2017, I presented what I had seen in a sermon entitled, "What is Man?" The effect on the listeners was profound, and God was glorified. Many talked with me excitedly afterwards, praising God with joyful hearts. One lady even declared, "This is a *high Sabbath!*" Another stopped her vehicle outside as she was passing me by on the way home afterwards. "Michael! Thank you! Thank you!" I shouted out in return, "Praise the Lord!"

But it did not stop there. Time went by, and a new pastor came to our church who knew nothing of the experience I had the previous Autumn. One day he stood up to preach, and as he did so the deacons passed out a mysterious item to each member of the congregation. It was a puzzle piece. He spoke about the value of each person in God's eyes, and that we should make efforts to reach out to former church members who had left. Towards the end of the sermon he asked each person to bring their puzzle piece into the foyer and place it on a table to be assembled together. However, as it happened, some forgot to do this, or lost their puzzle pieces.

A couple of weeks later, the pastor again stood up at the pulpit. I was sitting at the piano when this happened. He began talking about the plans the church was making to reach out to missing church members, and then he held something up. In his hands was a portrait of Christ, made of the puzzle pieces – and several pieces were missing, which he declared represented the missing members. I heard a gasp from many in the congregation when they saw this, and I smiled. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

This was not to be the end of this story, however, for God was saving the best for last. A little over a year and half later, I attended the British Columbia Camp Meeting located near the city of Hope, BC. The date was July 28, 2018 and to my amazement the theme was titled "Reflecting God's Glory". I had volunteered to play piano for the Young Adult meetings being held in the camp lodge auditorium (the "upper room", as I like to call it). I played for Sabbath School and enjoyed the presentations given. Then came the main service, and who do you think was the main speaker? Anil Kanda – the same preacher I had heard on AudioVerse while driving to work that extraordinary day. As I sat there listening, the Lord gave me an impression: "Michael, I am going to do something special tonight". I wondered what was meant by this and looked forward to the evening service.

That night, instead of being asked to play again, I was invited to introduce the speaker to the audience. I felt a bit nervous as I went to the front. But as I turned to face the room packed full of people, an incredible sense of déjà vu came over me. There, at the back of the room, was a painting of the face of Jesus Christ hanging on the wall. And all around it there were hundreds of people sitting and standing, in the perfect shape of a

rectangle – or portrait. To my right was Anil Kanda, a messenger from God as it were, which is just what the word “angel” means. As if this was not enough, the title of Anil’s sermon for that evening was: “The Testimony of Anil Kanda” – exactly the same title of the sermon I heard in my truck on April 27, 2017. This was too much. I felt weak in the knees. It felt as though I was now re-experiencing these things in real life.

That night, before introducing Anil, I briefly shared my experience and the things God had revealed to me with the whole room. I told them that every person there was of eternal value. They are priceless. You are priceless. Friends, don’t let anyone or anything pull you out of the portrait of Christ. You were made for this reason: to let God’s glory shine through you for all the universe to see. O, what a privilege, what a high calling, we have! Praise the Lord!

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