



Article # 3

Daniel's Journey

The spiritual journey of young Daniel is an intriguing story set in the beautiful countryside of central Europe. From his earliest days, Daniel was Catholic. As an infant, he was baptized by the parish Priest. His parents took their children to church every Sunday. And when Daniel was old enough to decide about it on his own, he continued to attend the church. He was more interested in spiritual things than many of his friends in school and at the university. A few years after graduation, Daniel became a Protestant. He began attending a *faith plus works* Protestant church. His experience isn't necessarily typical – nor does the telling of his story intend to condemn or judge Catholicism or Protestantism. It is just an example of one man's spiritual journey that almost ended where it began.

As he grew older, Daniel's frustration with his church also grew. They insisted that one must be baptized in their way to be saved. They did acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross to pay for sins. However, they seemed to threaten the parishioners with eternal condemnation if they didn't follow their special rules. Daniel surmised that if he lived by those rules, he might someday get to Heaven – but he was never quite sure. Daniel's friend from the university attended a different Catholic church in a nearby village. That church defined the rules in a somewhat different way. Moreover, his cousin lived in New York where he attended a large Catholic church where the rules were more lenient. Daniel wondered about which church was right. He lived in spiritual confusion. Mounting fear about his standing with God seemed to lurk in the pews and stone corridors of his boyhood church. His confusion and fear compelled him to be at Mass early every morning and twice on Sunday. Somehow, it never seemed to be enough. Daniel went to his friend's church too - just in case they were right. Daniel often was awake in the night wondering if he had done enough. He prayed that God would show the truth to him.

One Sunday, Daniel's spiritual unrest brought him to the door of a small Protestant church thirty kilometers away in a neighboring town. No one knew him in that town so he didn't have to worry. At first, he was uncomfortable in the simply decorated church with its few and empty crosses. He wondered if they really understood that Jesus had been on a cross. He also wondered if he would be condemned for being in a Protestant church. Daniel sat in the back by the door as the service began. He didn't understand why the first part of the service was so casual. He was embarrassed when it was time to pray – he was the only one who knelt. Daniel listened attentively to the pastor's message. It was much longer than what he was used to. The pastor spoke about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. That made Daniel more comfortable. He stopped wondering about the empty crosses. The pastor spoke of salvation by grace. It made sense to Daniel when he heard about the free gift of salvation. The pastor invited people to come forward to receive Jesus. Daniel thought he had done that many times before in the Mass. But he was the first one kneeling at the simple altar-table. Three others went forward too – a young couple and a six-year old boy. They all said the sinner's prayer with the pastor. Daniel didn't understand everything in the prayer – but he said it anyway.

After the prayer, the preacher announced that there would be a baptismal service that evening at 6:30 PM. Daniel explained that he had already been baptized in the Catholic Church. The pastor told him that wasn't good enough. To complete his salvation transaction, Daniel would have to be immersed during the evening service. Fear began to emerge. Daniel rode the bus home praying that they wouldn't get into a serious accident. He wondered about what would happen to him if he died before the baptism. As he stepped off the bus, he looked both ways cautiously. He was the first one at the bus stop late that afternoon. He would take no

chances on missing the bus. A small group gathered with him – most traveling home after a Sunday's outing. The bus didn't arrive on time – and it began to rain. The bus arrived a full hour late. There would be just enough time to get to the church with no further delays. However, an accident along the route delayed the trip another 30 minutes. Daniel kept looking at his watch. Fifteen minutes more delay accompanied a loud disagreement between a passenger without a proper ticket and the bus driver. Then the driver stopped at the petrol station delaying the trip ten more minutes. With the rain slowing traffic a little, Daniel finally arrived in the town well over two hours late. He ran ten blocks through the light rain to the little church. No one was there. The service had ended without him. Despondent and wet, He walked back to the bus stop. His old fears were growing.

He was the first one at the little church on the next Sunday. He took the first bus. The preacher's message was very much the same as the previous Sunday. Daniel didn't know if he should go forward again at the invitation. He did so – just to be sure. After the service, the preacher scolded him for missing the baptismal service. He told Daniel that if he was serious about being saved, he had to be at the baptismal service that evening. Daniel spent the afternoon looking in the windows of closed shops and sitting on a bench in the town center. He wouldn't risk another bus problem. He was baptized during the evening service. His fears seemed to subside. He was back at the little church on the next Sunday. He sat up near the front. The preacher told the parishioners that he was very disappointed that some hadn't been there for the regular Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Daniel decided that he would be there every Wednesday evening. He would have to board the bus immediately after work – but that was okay. The preacher's message was different at the Wednesday prayer meeting. It was a long message about publicly confessing Christ. They really didn't have enough time to pray that night. The preacher said that if you don't publicly confess Jesus, then you aren't truly saved. All in the church were invited to a special three-week teaching series on Friday evenings. He would be teaching them how to evangelize – how to confess Jesus to lost people. Daniel was the first to sign the *I'll-be-there* list. He wanted his friends to know Jesus. He wanted to learn how to confess Jesus to them. On the bus ride home, he began to worry more. He had never confessed Jesus publicly to his friends and family. Was he really saved? Would his intention to attend the classes count for something with God? He cautiously looked both ways as he stepped off the bus. He didn't sleep much that night. He wished it were three weeks later. The busy commute from his office on Friday evenings proved to be more difficult than he had thought. Nevertheless, Daniel felt that no sacrifice was too great if he could finally be assured that he had done all to be saved. Moreover, the pastor said that his friends were doomed if Daniel didn't tell them about Jesus. After the three-week course ended, Daniel felt better – but nervous. He began trying to tell his friends and family about Jesus. They didn't listen much (especially at the office) – but at least he was confessing. He began to feel a little secure about his salvation.

Most in the little church knew Daniel by name. They were like a second family to him. That took away a little of the sting of being ostracized by some of his Catholic friends at home. The little church was growing. Many in the congregation complained that it was getting too crowded. Daniel seemed to be the only one who liked the crowded feeling – it was like home where there were five in his parent's little flat. The preacher's message on the next Sunday was about the need for more space. He said that God wanted them to build. It would cost a lot for the small congregation. He preached from Malachi 3:8-11 insisting that no one who was a true Christian would rob God. He proclaimed loudly that true Christians would bring their full tithes and offerings to the storehouse – and that little church was God's storehouse. He said that true Christians would obey or they weren't truly saved. Daniel rode home on the bus thinking about how little he had done for the church and for the pastor. He hadn't been giving a full tithe to them. He thought about his small salary. He thought about his ill father who couldn't work and about his mother who earned so little cleaning a small shop down the lane. Daniel wanted to honor them. He wanted to help them as much as he could from his salary. How could he do that if he tithed and gave extra offerings to the little church? He didn't know how he would be able to title and afford the bus fare to be at the church so many times each week. The preacher had said that any true Christian would be at every meeting – preaching from Hebrews 10:25. Daniel couldn't be at every meeting. He worried about that – and he was very tired from his rigorous schedule. He hadn't slept much in several weeks. After church when the bus stopped a few blocks from his parents' home, he stepped off forgetting to look either way. He walked home slowly. There was no need to hurry. He didn't want to tell his parents about not helping them as much. Moreover, why hurry home to stare at the ceiling for half of the night? Daniel began to wonder about attending his friend's Protestant church. He thought about going to both churches. Would the pastors approve? He tried to go to both for a while – but the conflicting

demands became too much of a burden. Moreover, his friend's cousin went to a big protestant church in California. Their rules and regulations were very lenient. They didn't even mention baptism. Who was right? Daniel had no assurance in his faith. His spiritual anxiety weighed him down. He longed to know that he was safe for eternity.

His frustration with the little church was growing faster than the congregation was. Daniel wondered how they could be so sure that someone wasn't saved if they weren't baptized in their way. They did acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross to pay for sins – but the pastor seemed to threaten his parishioners with eternal condemnation if they didn't obey certain rules. All had to live by the little church's rules to get to Heaven. Daniel began to wonder if that little church was any different from the church he had left. Both made Daniel feel the same way. The fear and uncertainty that had commenced his spiritual journey were ultimately there at his destination. He tossed and turned most of Saturday night wondering what he would do in the morning. He finally slipped off into a restless sleep a little after 3 AM. Exhaustion took over – and may have been what kept him in bed later than normal in the morning. The first time he looked at the clock was at 9:20 AM - the departure time of the last bus that could get him to the church on time. His parents were drinking coffee when he sleepily stumbled into the kitchen. He felt that he hadn't really seen them in months. He surprised his mother by accepting a cup of coffee. She thought he would have been too hurried to drink it with them. They had a good talk and enjoyed a few day-old pastries from the shop where she cleaned. It was a relaxing morning. A few hours passed by like a few minutes.

Early in the afternoon, Daniel put a small blanket, some bread, cheese, a ripe tomato, a bottle of water from the town's spring, and his Bible into a backpack. He threw it over his shoulder and began a relaxed walk across town to a meadow in the park. It was nice to slow down on the way and be able to notice things again. Flowers were in bloom in a neighbor's garden – the bees had noticed too. Children were playing on the sidewalk in front of Michael's candy shop. Daniel stopped to buy a sweet as his picnic dessert. He bought a few extra for the children outside. He hadn't seen Michael in a long time – it was good to talk with him for even just a few minutes. The meadow was quiet when he got there. A young couple sitting on a bench down near the stream were the only people he saw. Daniel stayed at his end of the meadow and chose a high spot in full sunshine. It was a beautiful afternoon. The air was fresh and warm. He spread the blanket on the ground – and took everything except his Bible from the backpack. His unruled picnic dinner was simple but tasted surprisingly good – especially the candy. For a few hours, he had forgotten his fears and uncertainty – that was until he returned the remnants of his picnic into the backpack. As soon as he noticed his Bible, uncertainty and fear came rushing back in. He took the Bible, almost reluctantly, from the backpack and put it on his lap. A frustrated Daniel, with eyes and palms lifted toward the sky, blurted aloud, "*God, please give me wisdom – please take away my fear!*" Not really knowing his way around the Bible, he let it fall open. His eyes were drawn to the one verse, "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*" 1 John 4:18. That puzzled Daniel. He had asked for wisdom, but this seemed to add to his confusion. If God loved him with perfect love, why was he so afraid? Daniel looked upward again, then bowed his head and asked, "*God what is this perfect love?*" Daniel's eyes were drawn across the page to, "*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" 1 John 4:10.

Daniel prayed, "*God, how can this love be mine?*" A verse came into Daniel's mind – surprising him that he remembered where it was. He turned to it and read, "*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*" Romans 4:5. Daniel remembered another passage. He turned to it and read the words of Jesus, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" John 11:25-26. Everything in the meadow seemed strangely hushed. The sunshine was warm – but Daniel felt chilled. He felt that something was happening to him. It was as if Jesus were sitting with him on the blanket asking, "*Daniel, do you believe this? Do you believe in Me?*" There had been no audible words – but Daniel knew exactly what he needed to do. The Lord had called him. It was time to take his step of faith. He bowed his head and prayed in repentance and faith, "*God, I do believe in Jesus.*" Tears were running down his face – but his heart was overflowing with joy. He could feel the weight of his burdens being lifted. Peace swept in displacing his fears. Daniel finally knew that he was safe for eternity. He felt strangely different in a good way. He turned to the beginning of the book of John and started to read. It finally made sense to him. He read for more than an hour. It was getting dark when he finally put his

Bible into the backpack and began the long walk across town to his parents' home. Somehow, the walk seemed easier. Maybe the streets were a little downhill. Or maybe the distance was a little shorter than he remembered. He wanted to talk to his parents, but they were already sleeping when he got home. Daniel quietly went to his room. He got into bed and turned the light off. The bed seemed more comfortable than he remembered, almost as he felt as a small boy when he would climb into his father's arms. Daniel was asleep in a few minutes. The next sound he heard was his mother preparing breakfast. He felt so awake when he got up. He told his parents that he would tell them some exciting news that evening when he returned from the office. They were surprised and pleased that he would be home for dinner. At the office later in the morning, he noticed that something had changed. He was talking to his co-workers about Jesus. He didn't feel any pressure to do it. It just seemed to happen. Telling them about his Savior seemed natural and easy – and they were listening. One young man asked if they could eat lunch together. He told Daniel something about having questions. Daniel thought that it was the beginning of a great new day. No, it was the beginning of a great new life. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Later that evening after a good dinner, Daniel talked with his parents about Jesus. They seemed genuinely interested. His mother interrupted at one point - asking if he was going back to the little church tomorrow after work. He told her that he was unsure about that. After some more discussion, Daniel went to his room. He sat up in bed with the light on. He picked up his Bible and read, *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith."* Romans 3:19-25. Daniel thanked God for Jesus – and thanked Him for the gift of salvation. Daniel prayed for his parents and for the young man at the office. He turned off the light and slid down into his comfortable bed. In just a few minutes, Daniel was sleeping soundly.

Some people believe that other things are needed for salvation in addition to faith - such as water baptism, continuing confession, and obedience. This is *faith + obedience = salvation*. That contradicts and dilutes grace if it is Catholic or Protestant. It proposes that salvation is a combination of the work of Christ and the work of the believer. The free gift described in Romans 6:23 isn't free at all, if we must partially pay for it. Without assurance, those who adhere to a faith plus works approach to salvation are burdened with fear and uncertainty. Daniel's story was written to help each one on a similar journey to peace, freedom, and assurance in the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. Then because of the free gift, they may press on to good works that glorify rather than appease their Father. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* Ephesians 2:8-10. Where are you along your journey? Are you helping a fearful sojourner find Jesus in the meadow sun?