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Karl Barth was a German theologian who has been called a modern "church father," for he does belong to the list of the greatest Christian thinkers of all time.

In 1962, 6 years before his death he made his only visit to the United States. He lectured at Union Theological School in Richmond Virginia. After the lecture he met with the students in an informal give and take session. Someone asked him if he could summarize his vast theological thinking and findings in a few sentences. The question was: "What in your judgement is the essence of the Christian faith?" Barth paused for a few minutes, as his listeners prepared for a deep and profound statement. Rather deliberately, Barth answered: "Yes, I can summarize in a few words my understanding of the Christian faith. Let me put it this way: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'".

What an overwhelming moment that must have been...there sat the greatest thinker of the age expressing his final conclusion about the faith using words he undoubtedly had learned at his mother's knee.....Yet, we know *instinct* instinctively that Barth was right.

We are reminded in the scripture to become as little children so that we can enter the kingdom. The essence of the Christian faith may be understood in the simplicity of

that childhood song.

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1. Jesus loves me, this I know. I know that Jesus loves me. One of the foremost human needs is to be loved. To hear the words "I love you" is to chase away self-doubt, fear, and loneliness. To be assured that we are loved covers our failures and leads to self-acceptance. To be loved, 'warts and all' is a blessing. And how much more of a blessing to be loved by Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God..not even death nor the powers of hell or our fears today or our worries about tomorrow.

All thru his life Jesus was saying to people, "I love you". Thru Christ, God is saying the same thing. When Christ healed the sick, touched the untouchable, loved the unlovable, he is saying to us "I love you as I loved them" When he endured the insults, the injuries, the disloyalties of men and women, he is saying, "Nothing you do will ever stop me from loving you". When Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him, he is saying, "nothing will stop my loving you". When he was flogged and nailed to the cross he prays: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". And in that prayer he is saying, "You can flog me, you can crucify me. Nothing you can do to me will ever stop my loving you".

And what Jesus says, God says. God is saying it now.

"I love you" Of that love we can be sure.

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2. For the Bible tells me so. The skeptic says: "How can you know beyond any doubt that God loves you?" He will want to debate and put down your faith. All you need to know and all you need to say, tho he may scoff is "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so"

The Bible is the written revelation of God. It was not found under some rock or buried in some hillside written in God's hand. It wasn't dictated to David or to Moses or to Hosea or to Mark or to Paul. The writers were inspired by God to write down revealed truths about God and humanity and eternity. The native language of Jesus was not King James English. The Bible is not a science book, nor is it an encyclopedia, nor is it an answer book, and it certainly is not a weapon.

The Bible is simply, yet divinely, a carrier of messages. And the central message is "God Loves" The Bible assures us of God's love for Abraham, for Moses, for David, for Ezekiel, for Obadiah, for all their kinsfolks, friends and enemies.

The Bible tells us of the love of Christ for those he came to save as well as for those who came to crucify him. And all thru the centuries of translations, of commentaries, of debates, the Bible brings the same message to you and to me "Jesus loves" And because we know this, we know that God loves.

Never before has there been so much scholarly work been done in studying the Bible. Never before has there been so much

debate. We throw around words and phrases like inerrant, ⁴ exegesis, form criticism, literal, verbal inspiration, "In the Greek" and so on and on. There is immense value to honest and responsible biblical scholarship and positive debate. But all that value is ~~it~~ nothing if the simple statement of faith "Jesus loves me" is not the final conclusion.

3. Little ones to him belong. Lelth Miller tells of an out-going 40 year old woman who was a part of a sharing group he led. She told this story: "When I was small ~~the~~ my parents died and I went to an orphanage. No one seemed to want me, but I longed to be adopted and loved by a family. I waited a long time. Then one day I heard to head of the orphanage say that a family was coming to take me home with them. I was so excited that I jumped up and down and cried. The matron reminded me that I would be on trial on that this was not ~~it~~ necessarily a permanent arrangement, but I just knew it would be. So I went with the family and started to school. I was the happiest little girl that you could imagine and life began to open up for me a little. But then one day a few months later I skipped home from school and ran in the front door of the house. No one was home, but there in the middle of the front hall was my battered old suitcase. As I stood there and looked at the suitcase, it slowly dawned on me what it meant. I did not belong here any more"

Then the woman went on and said: "This happened to me 7

before I was 13 years old. But don't cry for me, for it was experiences like that that brought me to God. When I ~~had~~⁵ was having so much trouble finding a sense of belonging from human beings, I was driven to God, and there I found what I had always longed for - a place."

"Little ones to him belong" We belong to Christ: Therefore, we belong to God. Our worth comes from God. Because we belong to him, we are special, loved, accepted, never to be rejected.

4. "They are weak but he is strong" Lance Rentzel, while a member of the Dallas Cowboys football team was arrested on the charge of indecent exposure. In his autobiography, he tells what a tremendous emotional trauma he went thru as he battled his illness..a weakness he had to face and deal with. After his arrest, Rentzel was concerned about embarrassing his team mates and hurting team morale. The news media had made a big deal of the incident. Later Rentzel was released from custody. One evening as the team met for a strategy session Rentzel stood up and tried to explain his problems, his embarrassment, and how he feared he would smear the teams name. He stood before the entire team, apologized and began to weep. No one spoke. Later the lights were put out as the team began to study films. Then an incredible thing happened, and Rentzel tells it like this:

"A hand grabbed my shoulder, a huge hand, and it held on,

supportively, and then, from the other side, a tap on the arm, then again. The room was dark and the coach was talking, but there was a shuffling and a sound of scraping chairs as one after another they moved to make contact with me. They wanted to convey the unspoken message: 'we're with you'. I wondered how I could have doubted them. I know one thing, I'll never forget that moment".

Rentzel found strength in the frank admission of his weakness. And in that difficult ~~point~~ moment he found the strong support of others. His team mates responded to him as a church, reaching out to support a broken member to bring him back into their home circle.

Have you ever felt that hand on your shoulder? That tap on your arm? A supportive touch to let you know that in spite of your weaknesses you are loved? I have. Jesus did. And so have you.

Jesus experienced weakness. He was not born some superman or ghostly figure who never suffered. Read the temptation story. Recall the time when the diseased mob crowded him wanting to feel his healing touch. He said: "Heal yourselves". Remember Gethsemane? "Lord, I don't want to die". But Jesus was strong. In every moment of weakness he leaned upon the strength of his heavenly Father. He felt a hand upon his shoulder. We are not like Jesus because we will not so frankly admit our weaknesses. And we will not depend on God so

completely. We fight tears, bite our lips, repress our feelings, hide our failures, and evade our weaknesses. (7)

Jesus learned to be strong by acknowledging his weaknesses and relying on a greater strength. We need to "go and do likewise" Only by facing our weaknesses will we ever be able to fully comprehend the strength of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Jesus loves me this I know

For the Bible tells me so

Little ones to him belong

They are weak but he is strong.