

“In Synoptic Gospels, our professor gave us all this evidence for the historical accuracy of the bible,” Beth said thoughtfully. “I didn’t pay much attention to it at the time, but now that I think about it, I realize how much that means.”

“Oh?” Dad leaned his elbows on the table. “How so?”

“Well, most of our ancient history that we learn as fact in school has much less reliable written evidence than the bible. Yet we base our understanding of the past on it. We treat the bible as fable and the less reliable sources as factual.” Beth took a drink of her soda. “There’s very strong internal and external evidence that the four gospels were based on eyewitness testimony of people who really knew Jesus Christ. Julius Caesar doesn’t have any eyewitness testimonies based on him. By that standard, he should be the one we treat as a myth, not Jesus.”

“Sounds like you’ve learned something vital, done some important things,” Dad said, “and I’ve missed out on it. Synoptic Gospels? Professor?”

“I’m a junior in bible college,” Beth blinked back tears of regret that she had so thoroughly shut her parents out of her and Danny’s lives. “That’s where I met Greg. ... He helped me see that ... I don’t really know God.”

“I’ve wondered about that,” Dad said sadly. “I never had peace about your salvation even though you were always a good girl. Your mother and I have spent many hours in prayer for you because we know that being a good girl isn’t good enough.”

“But Dad,” Beth leaned toward him, “how did I grow up in the church and not get it? We prayed the sinner’s prayer almost every week in church! How come it didn’t take for me?”

“I guess it wasn’t your time, Sweetie. You didn’t see your need. You were always so smart and strong.”

“I’m still too smart for my own good,” Beth sighed. “When we studied soteriology in theology class, I got so wrapped up in trying to understand the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism that I missed entirely the deeper significance of salvation.”

“How’s that?”

“Does God choose us and call us with the irresistible call from the foundation of the world with no foreknowledge involved? Calvinism in a nutshell. It puts our salvation entirely in God’s hands and makes our free will subject to his control.”

“Or?”

“God calls us from the foundation of the world because he has looked down through history and seen that we will choose him. Arminianism. It believes that somehow, in some way, for some reason, God decided to subject his control to our free will, at least when it comes to salvation. But he does it in such a way that he’s still the initiator of the salvation.”

“What are you thinking you missed?”

“Both sides have good evidence from the bible, but they ignore or reinterpret each other’s evidence. They both get so confusing and convoluted. In fact, I know that if a Calvinist and an Arminian were sitting with us, they would both correct me on the errors of my statements to you just now. They would say I had oversimplified their understanding of soteriology.” Frustrated, Beth rubbed her tearing eyes.

“Why do we have to make it so hard, Daddy?” she sighed. “Why can’t we just accept that God is not a man? That he doesn’t do things in ways that we can always understand?” She looked up with tears on her cheeks. “Why can’t we just accept that since the Incarnation itself makes no real sense to the human mind, how can anything else about God? The Incarnation is an unfathomable act of love, so maybe the mechanics of salvation are also beyond our comprehension. Why can’t we just accept the mystery of his love and know that he’s calling us? Does it really matter how or why he called us? Doesn’t it just matter that we answer his call?”

“Yes baby,” Dad covered her hand with his, “that’s all that really matters.”