



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #11: "The Eternal Law of God"

The Sin of Steve Audaine

The thought of facing a judge in a courtroom to give account for something that we have done can be a very frightening thought. All of us can think of things we have done that we would rather not have to face again, and certainly not before the God of the Universe.

What a blessing it is to know that we have a Friend in that court. A sentence is still executed in every case of guilt, but thank God the penalty has been paid already for anyone who brings his case to that Friend, our Lawyer and High Priest, Jesus.

Our story illustrates the kind of love Jesus shows for us by His willingness to pay for our guilt Himself.

Steve Audaine, the young money order clerk, was hard at work when the postmaster bustled back among the mail distributors.

"Has old R.F.D. arrived?" asked the postmaster.

"No sir, not yet," replied one of the clerks. "He's generally here by seven. I hope he's not snowed in.

"Here he is," Steve called out, "I can see him out there in the snow."

The postmaster went to help the old rural mail carrier hitch his faithful mare to the post.

"Come on in," the postmaster said, "It's cold. You might as well keep warm. The old 32 won't be in until after 11 o'clock—four hours late, so you'll have a long wait."

The morning crept slowly by as the old man waited around the workroom.

Suddenly he saw something, or thought he saw something that shocked him. It seemed that Steve Audaine had slipped a letter from the pile into his coat pocket. Startled, old R.F.D. watched him intently.

Once again the old man saw the boy slip a letter into his pocket. When there was a lull in business old R.F.D. came over and stood by Steve's wire-enclosed office.

"Steve, lad!"

The boy started—a guilty start. "What is it? What do you want?"

"Nothing much," R.F.D. paused, "Only I forgot the new mail sacks."

R.F.D. continued apparently aimlessly. "Purty cold, ain't it Steve?"

"Sure is, R.F.D. Why, just think, last year the roses were in bloom in December. Warmest winter since '91."

"Yea, Steve, that was a warm winter," R.F.D. continued, "flowers bloomed in February, but they had a freeze in April. I never got to see that freeze though."

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"Why not?" Steve queried.

His words were measured. "I spent that time in prison."

Steve's attention riveted on R.F.D. "In prison! You?"

"Yes, boy. Sent up in '91. Post Office robbery. I got 15 years."

"Fifteen years in prison? Fifteen years! Why that's a lifetime!"

"That's what I thought. It was more than a life-time. It was an eternity. The stone walls, the stripes, the ball and chain, and always the hopeless knowledge that tomorrow would be exactly like today. They took away my clothes and gave me a number. I was no longer a man; I was a criminal, an outcast, a thing to be shunned and pointed at. I was a thief."

The boy shifted uneasily. His hand involuntarily went toward the pocket with the stolen letter. R.F.D. moved toward him and spoke with a fierceness that Steve had never before heard him use.

"I saw my wife torn from my arms, forced into the street to starve. My baby boy was sick. I had been having a hard winter. I stole a letter containing twenty dollars. They tore me away from my loved ones, away to that living death. Then the worst happened. Not a word came from my wife; not a letter, not a message, absolute silence. More than a year later—I heard—that—she—was—d—dead. And I never knew until after a year. Something died in me that night. For the first time in my life I hated humanity. I determined to be revenged upon a society that had so unjustly used me. For three years I lived with but one purpose, to get free—and then to get revenge!"

The old man was carried away by his emotions. Steve, scarcely less touched, tried to comfort him by asking, "What happened to your boy? You didn't lose him, did you?"

"No, that was the only thing that saved me. I heard a traveling evangelist preach on our duty to the living. Even the lowest outcast owes a duty to his fellow man, a duty to his offspring. I thought of my boy out there in the big world all alone—I determined to make a new start. I determined to live for my boy."

"And you found him?"

"I'd give anything, lad, to answer 'yes,' but I can't. I've never seen my boy since the day they tore me away from his little arms. But I will find him. God is good. I have suffered more than my share. I have sinned, but I have paid the penalty. Someday I'll find my boy. But, oh, lad, for fifteen years I paid the penalty of my one thoughtless sin. I robbed the government mail. I stole \$20 and that act of sin cost me my wife, my only child, and fifteen years of my life."

Steve's answer was interrupted by the announcement that the delayed train had arrived. Old R.F.D. hurried away to sort the mail.

Two weeks later Kate, one of the stamp clerks, called R.F.D. over to her desk.

"I've got a letter," she said, "for Mr. Ira Troutman, Esquire."

"A letter for me?"

"Yes, the clerk didn't know who Mr. Troutman was."

"No, I reckon not. So many call me 'Old R.F.D.' that no one around here knows 'cept you and the postmaster. 'Taint necessary. Old R.F.D. is a pretty good name."

The old man came alive as he read the letter. "Good news, Kate, I've just been awarded a homestead, a little farm way up in Montany. I'll kinda hate to leave my friends here in the post office, but I've always wanted a home. When I find my boy, I'll have a home ready for him."

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"Do you think you'll ever find him?" Kate responded.

"Yes Miss Kate, I sure do. The Lord is good. I trust Him. Someday, I'll find my boy."

"What's his name, R.F.?"

"Same as mine, Ira Troutman, Jr."

As the old man started out with his load, a clerk brought him word that the postmaster wanted to see him in the inspectors office.

The theft had been discovered.

An hour later all of the post office employees stood together before the inspector as he questioned them one by one.

"Now, Mr. Peavy, has any worker here borrowed money from you?"

Peavy glanced at Steve's shifting gaze before answering. "Yes sir.

"And who was it?"

"Mr. Audaine."

"How much was it?"

"Ninety-eight dollars."

"Has he paid it back?"

"Two weeks ago he paid me \$20 on it. Last Saturday night."

"Alright, thank you. Now, Miss Kate Kenyon."

Kate came forward.

"Has any worker here borrowed money from you?" The inspector watched her intently as he spoke.

Kate's face paled. "No sir," she said weakly.

"Kate, some money has been robbed from a letter. One hundred dollars. Do you know anything about it?"

The reply was almost inaudible. "No sir. I don't think so."

"You do know. Answer me. Have you any idea who took that money?"

Kate turned away and staggered. The postmaster assisted her to a chair. Old R.F.D. hurried to get her a glass of water but she refused it.

The inspector turned to Steve Audaine.

"Mr. Audaine. Do you know anything about this case?"

Steve hesitated and mumbled. "No sir, I don't."

Like a thunderclap the voice of the inspector broke the silence;

"You lie, Steve Audaine. You stole that hundred dollars."

"No sir, I-I-I"

"You saw Mrs. Jeffs mail that letter. You heard her tell the postmaster it had money in it. You were in debt up to your neck. You took the letter and stole that hundred dollars."

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Steve could scarcely speak. His lips moved, but no sound would come.

The inspector continued with the tenacity of a bulldog. "Where did you get the money to pay your bills all over town? We've got your number, understand? We've got you."

Steve found his voice. "No, it's all a mistake. I never took the money."

"Young man, I'm sorry for you," the inspector spoke more gently, "You've had a hard life. Now, the thing to do is to come clean and confess. Let me see, you came from the orphanage didn't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Do you even know who your mother and father are?"

"No sir."

"Don't even know your real name do you?"

"Yes sir," Steve looked him in the eye. "My real name is Ira Troutman."

The glass of water crashed from old R.F.D.'s hand to the floor. Every eye turned to him. He trembled, then with a mighty effort he steadied himself and crossed the room.

"Stop, Inspector! I'm the man you want. I'm a thief. My record's against me. I spent fifteen years in prison for stealing from the post office. Take me away Inspector."

The inspector led him out.

The next day Kate visited old R.F.D. in the county jail.

"Oh, R.F.D., I am so sorry. Why did you take the burden of this crime on yourself? You never stole that money. You are assuming guilt that's not yours. You are giving up your liberty, your very life, for a guilty man."

R.F.D.'s voice faltered only slightly as he answered "What greater love hath a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend?"

"I know," Kate nodded, "you are doing this for him—for your son Steve Audaine."

"Miss Kate! You know my secret! Ah, you recognized his name same as I did!" R.F.D. looked into her eyes. "Yes, I'm doing it for my son. Just think, Steve Audaine is my little boy! But please don't tell him. You won't let him know that his father was—that I am his father will you? No, I just couldn't let my boy know that his father was a thief."

Steve Audaine entered the room just then. He paused as he saw Kate.

"I want to speak to R.F.D., Kate, I have something to say to him."

The tone of his voice and the look in his eye told Kate the purpose of his visit.

"I understand Steve," she replied, "And I honor you for it. All may be well yet. I am going to appeal to Mrs. Jeffs. I'm sure the inspector will not press the issue if she drops the charges."

She hurried away leaving father and son face to face.

Taking R.F.D.'s hand, Steve struggled to master the emotion in his voice.

"Why did you say it?" he asked as he looked into the old man's eyes.

"There, there boy. Now, please leave this old man alone. I'd rather not talk about it." Gently he put the boy's hands away from him.

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"I can't go away," Steve sobbed. "I took the money and you are acting as if you did. All through the night one word rang through my ears. 'Coward, coward.' I was careless, I was in debt, now I'm a thief. I was weak and foolish, but now I'm a man. Do you think I could allow you to go to prison for my crime? 'Do you think I could live with the word 'Coward' ringing in my ears forever? I am going to the inspector to tell him the truth."

He started for the door but R.F.D. stopped him.

"No boy, I'm an old man. You—why you've got your whole life before you. Prison would ruin you forever. Let me go in your place. Please, lad, please!"

"But why? Why are you doing this for me?"

"It doesn't matter, just live like I would want my own boy to do. When you're tempted to do wrong, just think of me out here in prison paying for you and praying for you, loving you and trusting you."

Finally, it was too much for R.F.D. "Steve," he said quietly, "I am your father."

Steve sank back in astonishment. "Father!"

"Son, I can't give you much, but I can give you one thing, my liberty. Care for it. Use it well."

Steve rose to his feet with new courage. With a husky voice he answered, "Never could I allow you to go back to that prison. I know my duty. I'm going to do it."

Not far away, Kate was pleading with Mrs. Jeffs for R.F.D.'s liberty. "Mrs. Jeffs," she said, "You don't really believe he stole that money, do you?"

Mrs. Jeffs hesitated. "I don't want to think so, he's such a nice old man."

"If he goes to prison," Kate continued, "He'll never survive. See, Mrs. Jeffs, here is one hundred dollars, two fifty-dollar bills, just like you lost in your letter. You wouldn't send him to prison if you got your money back would you?"

Mrs. Jeffs hesitated again.

"I knew you didn't really want to see him imprisoned. Look, here is a taxi. Come with me to the jail to see the inspector. Tell him you won't press charges. The life of that old man is in your hands."

Kate quickly helped Mrs. Jeffs into her coat and hurried her away to the jail. The determination in Mrs. Jeffs' eye revealed the excitement she now felt as she faced the inspector. "Mr. Cochran, sir, you have old R.F.D. arrested in there for stealing my hundred dollars, don't YOU."

The inspector nodded.

"Well, I want you to let him go. He didn't steal my money. The idea of your arresting the old man!" Hurriedly she went on, showing him the money that had been returned to her. Somehow she convinced him that the thing to do was to drop the charge and set him free.

An hour later, Kate stood radiantly happy as she watched father and son stand reunited, rejoicing in their freedom. "Well," R.F.D. said, "The little homestead is waiting for us in Montana son, we can start a new life there together."

Friends, our Saviour, like old R.F.D., was willing to take the court sentence for our guilt, Unlike this story however, the charges were not dropped. He had to pay the whole thing.

How unfortunate it would be for your name or mine to be called up in judgment and for Jesus to have to say, "I'm sorry, I can't take your case. You never accepted my offer to take your case. You never indicated you wanted help, you never indicated you wanted to change. I never knew you."