Exemplum Essay, Research Paper

He did not know why he was reading the pamphlet that was handed to him when he boarded the train. He had often seen people handing out these little booklets to passers-by. The man had even taken a few in the past to be polite, but they were always ?filed? in the nearest wastebasket. This one was entitled ?The Gospel of John.? He had forgotten to purchase a newspaper to read during the ride home for this long awaited three-day weekend. So rather than sleep or view the passing scenery, the man decided to read the pamphlet. It is not that he was unfamiliar with the text; he had heard little bits of it on an occasional Sunday. However, today was the first time he actually read, ?For God so loved the world, He gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.? He found it hard to believe that God, or anyone for that matter, would sacrifice his son for others.

The commuter stopped reading as the train entered a canyon along a river. He decided the scenery was more interesting than the reading material, so he turned his gaze and watched the rock formations of the canyon as they passed his window. As the train rounded the final blind curve that would bring them over the river, he was surprised to catch a glimpse of the drawbridge as it completed its closing motion. He had never seen this before and the grace with which this large structure closed fascinated him. It also gave him a bit of a fright, because the train was rapidly approaching the bridge. This concern was voiced to the conductor, who told him that for the first time in his memory, the train was running ahead of schedule by approximately twenty minutes. The conductor guessed that this might be the reason for the man?s observation. The conductor assured him neither he nor the rest of the passengers were in danger. There was always someone at the bridge whose job it was to close the bridge according to the train?s schedule or when the warning lights showed the approach of an early train. This time the lights notified the worker, which was why the commuter saw the bridge closing. The man looked for this worker as the train passed over the bridge, but wherever this ?keeper-of-the-bridge? was, he was not in view. The rest of the trip was uneventful. The man arrived home earlier than normal and he was happy for that. He was looking forward to a well-deserved rest, and it was beginning about one half hour earlier than expected, thanks to the speed of the train.

The weekend went quickly, too quickly for him. As he left the train for the walk to his office on Tuesday morning, he picked up a newspaper to read. Unfortunately, the man had no time to read the paper at work. The day was a busy one. So much for the day off, it seemed as though everyone needed something, and needed it yesterday. In what seemed like no time at all, he was headed back for his train. The commuter wondered if the train would run ahead of schedule again; he liked getting home early. As he approached the train, he saw the man who had given him the pamphlet the Friday before. He inadvertently made eye contact, so he was handed another booklet to read. He glanced at it as he went into his train-car and noticed it was the same one he was given the other day. He tossed it into a wastebasket as he went to his seat to read the morning paper. It was then that he noticed the headline on the bottom of page one, ?Tragedy at Canyon River Bridge, Services Today.? A chill went through his body as he began to read.

It told about the bridge worker who had brought his son to work with him. The boy had always wanted to go to see how the bridge worked. During the slow time of the day, his father had shown him the tracks that ran across the bridge, its large pieces of steelwork, and the gears that drove the bridge up and down. The gears attracted the boy the most; they were much taller than he was and seemed perfect for climbing. After they had shared their dinner, the boy asked his father if he could go down to inspect the gears once more. The father checked his watch, saw there was time, and told him he could go. When the warning lights unexpectedly began to flash, the bridge worker thought it was an error. To his horror, when he turned to look up the canyon, he saw the outline of the train. He knew he had to close the bridge or the hundreds of people on the train would die; he also knew that closing the bridge would mean the sacrifice of his son.

The man could read no further. Trembling, he put down the paper, went to the wastebasket, and retrieved the booklet he had so effortlessly tossed into the trash. With tears welling up in his eyes, he again began to read, but this time, the text was more than just words.