

UNLIMITED

THE MAGAZINE

ROSE'S STORY

Rose's is a shocking story of pain and loss. But now she has the comfort of Jesus... (page 2)



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NEW
BOOK

Trimillennialism: Revelation 20 and the Final Judgement

RITCHIE WAY

Two quite different interpretations of Revelation 20 emerged early in the history of the Christian Church. Around AD 120 Papius taught that there would be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ would be established on this earth (ANF 1.154). On the other hand, Victorinus of Pettau, who was martyred by emperor Diocletian about 303, wrote, 'Those years during which Satan is bound are during the first coming of Christ—even to the end of the age. They are called a thousand years...' (ANF 7.358). So, in the theological language of today, Papius was a premillennialist, and Victorinus an amillennialist.

Amillennialism teaches that the millennium is the period between the first and second advents, whereas premillennialism teaches that the millennium is the period after the second advent. These two interpretations of the millennium are the only two that have had general and enduring acceptance in the Christian Church. The proponents of each view have generally regarded their particular interpretation of the millennium as the only correct one.

This ground-breaking book, *Trimillennialism: Revelation 20 and the Final Judgement*, claims that these two views are complementary rather than conflicting: Amillennialism, portrays the fulfilment of the prophecy of the 1000 years, while premillennialism portrays its consummation. If this is true, however, in what way was this prophecy inaugurated (because it

is not possible to have a fulfilment and a consummation without an inauguration)?

The thesis of *Trimillennialism: Revelation 20 and the Final Judgement* is that the prophecy of Revelation 20 had its **inauguration** in the ministry of Jesus; that it is now being fulfilled by the Holy Spirit in this present age; and that it will be **consummated** by the Father in the age to come.

There is very little gospel in most interpretations of the millennium but this book is an exception because its most significant contribution to our understanding of the millennium is not just its tripartite nature, but that the very essence of the one thousand years of Revelation 20 is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For many readers, *Trimillennialism: Revelation 20 and the Final Judgement* will also provide new insights on the nature of Christ, his death, his kingdom, man before and after the Fall, the new birth, God's final judgement, and the destiny of the unrepentant.

Trimillennialism: Revelation 20 and the Final Judgement has been written in plain English in order to make it readable for as many people as possible. The use of theological jargon, therefore, has been avoided. Where this has not been possible, definitions have been provided in the footnotes.

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EDITORIAL

The driver of the Mount Cook Tourist coach, fed up with the loud-mouthed Texan who was regaling everyone with tall tales of his homeland, frantically searched his mind for something to top him. Remembering that a pair of ducks was nesting in the long grass beside the letterbox at the entrance gate to the next farm, he smiled to himself and switched on the intercom.

"Folks, we are approaching a farm where the manager has trained a pair of ducks to come down to his letterbox every day to collect his mail. If you look out the windows on the left you may be privileged to see these famous birds."

As the bus approached the gateway the driver opened the front door and, praying that the ducks were still there, yelled, "No mail today!" With a flurry of wings, a pair of frightened ducks took off across the paddock towards the farmhouse.

The wide-eyed Texan slumped back in his seat. Shaking his head in disbelief, he announced, "W'all, if I hadn't seen it with mah own eyes, ah'da never believed it." No doubt, on returning to his native land, the story of the mail ducks would be told as often as the occasion permitted.

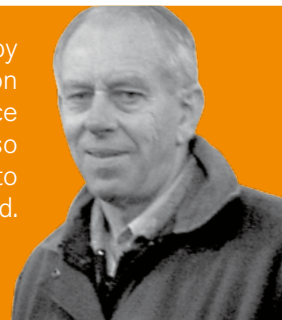
It's amazing how gullible people are, how willing they are to believe something on the basis of the slimmest evidence. Two ducks flying out of the grass near a letterbox doesn't mean that they were waiting there for the mail, or that they carried it to the homestead.

You may be surprised to know that the belief that Jesus will take to heaven all who live 'relatively good lives' has an even slimmer foundation than the theology of 'duck mail-delivery'.

If "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10), and if

Instead, they were saved by Jesus, who died for them on the Cross. The experience of this knowledge was so liberating they wanted to share it with the world.

Ritchie Way
Executive Editor



"the wages of [just one] sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), then people who live relatively good lives will almost, but not quite, make it to heaven. Heaven would cease to be heaven if just one person was admitted who was morally correct in everything but in handling other people's assets, or in telling an occasional lie. Heaven, according to the apostle Peter, will be "the home of righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). Only people who are 100 percent righteous will be admitted.

"Do you know anyone who is 100 percent righteous?" you may respond. Yes, I do. I know a great many who are 100 percent righteous. They are all good people who long to be like Jesus, but who continually fall short. Their sins, however, are not held against them because they put their faith in Jesus, who died for their sins. In exchange for their sins, Jesus has credited his perfect righteousness to their accounts (2 Cor. 5:21). That righteousness alone is their passport through the pearly gates. This righteousness that saves us is a free gift from the Lord. It's theirs ... and yours, for the asking.

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Goodbyes (and New Contact Details)

After sixteen years of loyal and faithful service to GNU as our Office Secretary, Carolyn Wagemaker has left Good News Unlimited. Many of you have deeply appreciated her wonderful ministry in so many ways over the

years. You will want to join all of us on the board of GNU in both thanking her and wishing her all of God's blessings in whatever he has prepared for her next.

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To spread the Word like wildfire through simple gospel content.

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ROSE'S STORY

I grew up in a big, loving Christian family. My parents taught us about Christian love and my five sisters and I shared everything. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, however, robbed me of all my loving people: my first-born son and daughter, my husband, my mother and father, my five sisters and my niece. The genocide began while I was on a short visit to Belgium. When I heard about it I prayed to God fervently, promising I would never turn my back on him if only he would protect my children. The bad news about the genocide kept coming, and I made more promises to God if only he would spare my family.

I became so desperate and confused that I could no longer pray for anyone except my children. I had never imagined feeling like this, literally gasping for breath, almost fainting at the thought of losing my children. Later, I could only pray that God would spare my youngest son.

Hacked to Death

I ran out of words. All I could do was repeat, "God! God!" But I was getting the news that every member of my family had been gruesomely hacked to death. God seemed as helpless as I was. Who do you turn to in such a situation?

“ The few friends who sent information from Rwanda urged me to accept the loss of all my people. I was in denial for many weeks...

The few friends who sent information from Rwanda urged me to accept the loss of all my people. I was in denial for many weeks but finally accepted the reality of what had happened.

A Miraculous Survival

I still believed I had one family member left – my youngest son, whom I had left with my mother. I had lost hope of seeing anyone alive but I held on to my little baby, hoping against hope that I might see him again.



Then I got the news that my mother had been killed. It was crazy to think that my baby could survive, but my heart remained focused on him. He was all I had left.

Three months later I learned that my baby had survived. I did not know what to do, there was so much exciting joy mixed with so much heartbreaking sorrow for what I had lost. And yet my living baby gave me a reason for living.

Then I asked myself why I had prayed only for my youngest child. Maybe God could have saved my other children if I hadn't said those words! We need to be careful with the words we say.

I hurried to bring my son to Belgium. It was a great reunion with my beloved son, but then the reality of the loss of my other children set in and I was plunged into a deep pain of grieving.



Facing Page:

Rose with Sammy on the

right who invited her to the meetings.

Clockwise from top left: Rose & her daughter

Nelly. Rose's son who was killed & Nelly.



Confronting the Killer

In 2010, I took my son back to Rwanda. We met the person who killed my family. He confessed and took us to the mass grave and I saw my two sisters. My son now understood why I was always crying. This experience opened up the wounds and I began seeing psychologists. I can say now, even though I didn't know it then, God intervened in my life and that is how I managed to survive.

Tragedy Strikes Again

Just recently another heartbreaking tragedy hit me. It seemed to confirm my conclusions that God was weak and didn't care, and I wanted to end my life. My 19-year-old son, my only child to survive the genocide was stabbed to death in Belgium – a country where there is security and peace!

I could not cope with this experience. My loss was so overwhelming that I had to depend on drugs every day. I forgot about my daughter Nelly (born to me and my new husband in Belgium). Friends tried to remind me about Nelly, that I still had her and one day she would give me grandchildren, but I didn't listen.

Mama, You have Me!

Eventually, I could tell my daughter about my sorrow. She told me, "Mama, I see you cry every day. Have you forgotten you..."

“ This grieving and anger continued every day until my son grew up. It was often difficult to go on. I cried, cried loudly, every day.

They Killed My Children!

I saw no reason to keep God in my life, so I gave up on him. I had trusted him and left every member of my family in his hands, but they had all perished. Why should I go on worshipping a weak God who is indifferent to our problems?

I was so ungrateful and forgetful, that even though God had preserved my son, I lived as though God never existed. This grieving and anger continued every day until my son grew up. It was often difficult to go on. I cried, cried loudly, every day. My son asked me why I was crying. I said to him, "They killed my children!" He asked, "What about me?" I then lied to him that I had taken him in my arms and fled.

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

...have another child? You have me!" She told me this again and again, and gradually, this woke me up. Nelly said I should pray to God and maybe this would help me. I told her that people who spend time praying had lost their minds.

Sammy and his friends from The Great Invitation Gospel Fellowship in Brussels visited me and prayed for me, but nothing could stop my burning anger. Worse, the alleged killer and his parents live nearby and I sometimes see them. I do not see any remorse and I have to wait for the courts to deal with this.

A Great Invitation

Then Sammy invited me to hear Pr Eliezer preaching at the gospel meetings in Brussels. I came every day, and Pr Eliezer taught us, reminding me of the things my parents had told us long ago: faith, forgiveness and love. For me, it was a new experience! God had never given up on me! He was always looking out for me.

Every evening when I went back home, I sat down and reflected on those messages. I realised that I had turned my back on him who loves us so much and I needed to turn back to him.

“For me, it was a new experience! God had never given up on me! He was always looking out for me.

I used to think I was the greatest sufferer, but I know now there are others who have suffered more. There are those who have nothing, not even one child, and I still have Nelly.

The messages I heard in the meetings led me to see that I had much to thank God for. I remembered the story of Job. Then I reflected on what Jesus had done for us and how he keeps searching for us even when we do not care about him.

God gave me Nelly so I would still have a child. I have much to thank God for and I pray he will continue sustaining me and help me to raise my daughter in the right way.

God is Not Tired of Our Tears

I realise now that God is on my side in good and bad times. He is patient and not turned off by our failures and doubts. Even when we turn our back on him, he persists with us. He is not tired of our tears. Other people may tire of us and be ashamed of us, but God never lets us down. All these things I have experienced and learned.

I used to insult God, but I could see others praising him. I used to despise the thought of praying to God after losing my son. When people advised me to turn to God, I scoffed. "Will he bring my son back?" But now I know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and one day he will bring back my son. Who is like God?

I am so blessed. God gave me Nelly who loves me. In trouble, we can go to God alone, who loves and cares for us. No matter what we go through, God is still our loving creator.

“He is patient and not turned off by our failures and doubts. Even when we turn our back on him, he persists with us. He is not tired of our tears.

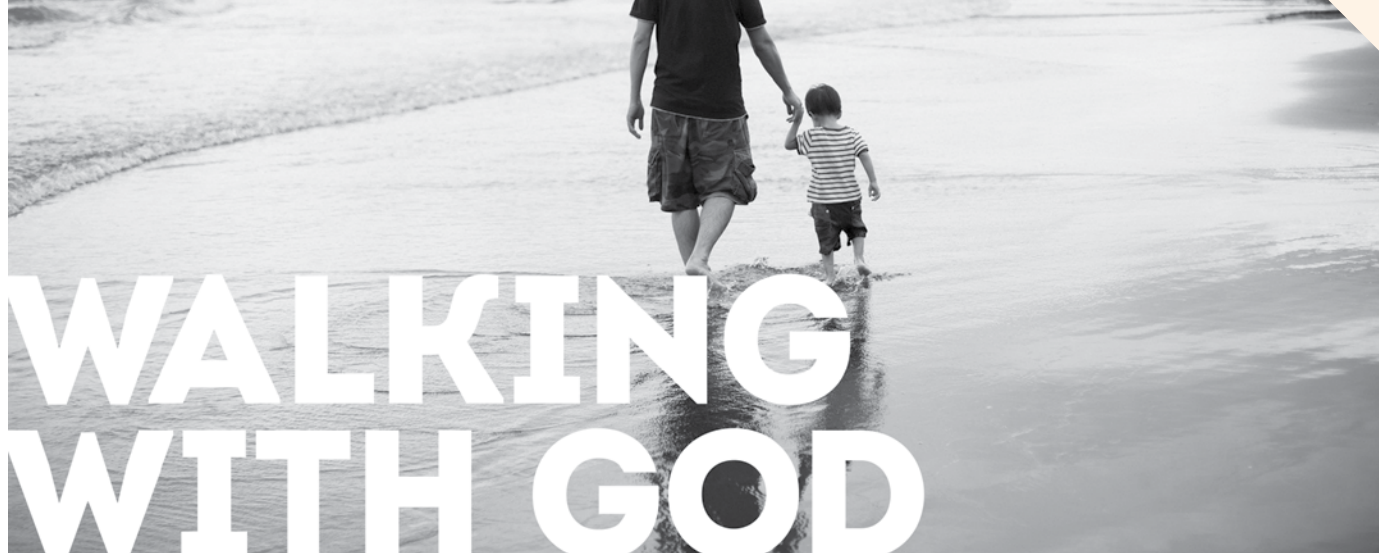
David Kayumba's Note:

Rose's is a shocking story of pain and loss. But now she has the comfort of Jesus, the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". She can identify with Jesus and is full of joy because of this Man. She learned from Dr Eliezer's messages that forgiveness is costly and that God never ceased loving and caring for her.

The Jesus whom Rose has found has motivated her to reach out to others. In the Brussels meetings with Eliezer, I discovered many new faces invited by Rose. I learned that if the meetings had continued for another couple of days, the hall would have been full, thanks to Rose. Rose was well known in the Rwandan community in Brussels as the woman who was angry with God, but now she is known for her dramatic journey into joy – the joy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With God's help and love, Rose is becoming a minister to others. In this way, God is healing her and others at the same time.

Today, Rose lives in Brussels with her daughter, Nelly. Rose narrated her story to Pr David Kayumba, who transcribed it and translated it. It was edited by Eliezer Gonzalez.



WALKING WITH GOD

I love the simple testimony of Enoch given in the fifth chapter of Genesis and the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and have pondered it many, many times. Enoch is mentioned in Scripture in only two other places, once in Luke 3:37 as part of the lineage of Jesus, and in Jude 14 where he predicts the second coming of Christ.

“...he was remembered, not for some great theology or even exceptional deeds, but simply because he “walked in habitual fellowship with God”...

What especially appeals to me about Enoch is the utter simplicity of his life and how he was remembered, not for some great theology or even exceptional deeds, but simply because he “walked in habitual fellowship with God” and, as a result, God finally took him home to continue that walk.

I think that those who finally arrive at the pearly gates will be those who have learned to walk with God in their earthly

pilgrimage, as Enoch did. They may know little or nothing of erudite theology, but God's love has warmed their hearts and they have developed a very close relationship with him.

That is the fellowship I seek in my earthly pilgrimage. It is not my strength to debate complicated theological matters; I choose rather to live in close fellowship with my God and some day I, like Enoch, will be called home to continue that fellowship with the Lord. Developing and maintaining that close walk with God is the burning passion of my life and I never want it to be otherwise. I also seek to do all within my power to encourage others to cultivate a close walk with God.

▼ **THOMAS E DURST**
Friend of Good News Unlimited

Tom Durst lives in Medical Lake, Washington, USA, and plays the organ at St John's Lutheran Church in Medical Lake and North Hill Christian Church in Spokane. Tom has an Internet ministry for the purpose of encouraging people to have an ever closer walk with God.

A MESSAGE FROM ELENNE FORD

Des' daughter and a board member of Good News Unlimited.

We appreciate so much the way that you have prayed for us, volunteered, and given us your financial support. In these ways you have expressed your faith in Christ and shared it with others.

In addition to this, some friends also choose to include Good News Unlimited in their will in the form of a bequest. Doing so ensures that some of the wealth they leave behind contributes directly to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with a dying world through the ministry and mission of Good News Unlimited – creating a legacy that affects lives far into the future.

My father and Gill have left a bequest to Good News Unlimited for the preaching of the gospel. In fact, after bequests to the family, most of their estate will be given to Good News Unlimited. I am also making provision for Good News Unlimited in my will, and I know that other board members are doing the same.

If you would like more information explaining how to include Good News Unlimited in your will, please contact Eliezer at GNU on 0413 473 043 or admin on 02 4721 9051.

LEAVE A
Legacy
THAT
IMPACTS
PEOPLE
FOR
YEARS
TO COME



One of the greatest stories ever told is found in 2 Kings, chapters six and seven. Ben-Hadad mobilised his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. There was a great famine in the city. Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?"

"You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it."

Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die? If we say, 'We'll go into the city' – the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die." So at dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans, but not a man was there.

“

Our unbelief is our worst enemy. The deliverance was solemnly promised, grievously needed, and yet not a soul believed in it.

These men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered into one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold, and clothes.

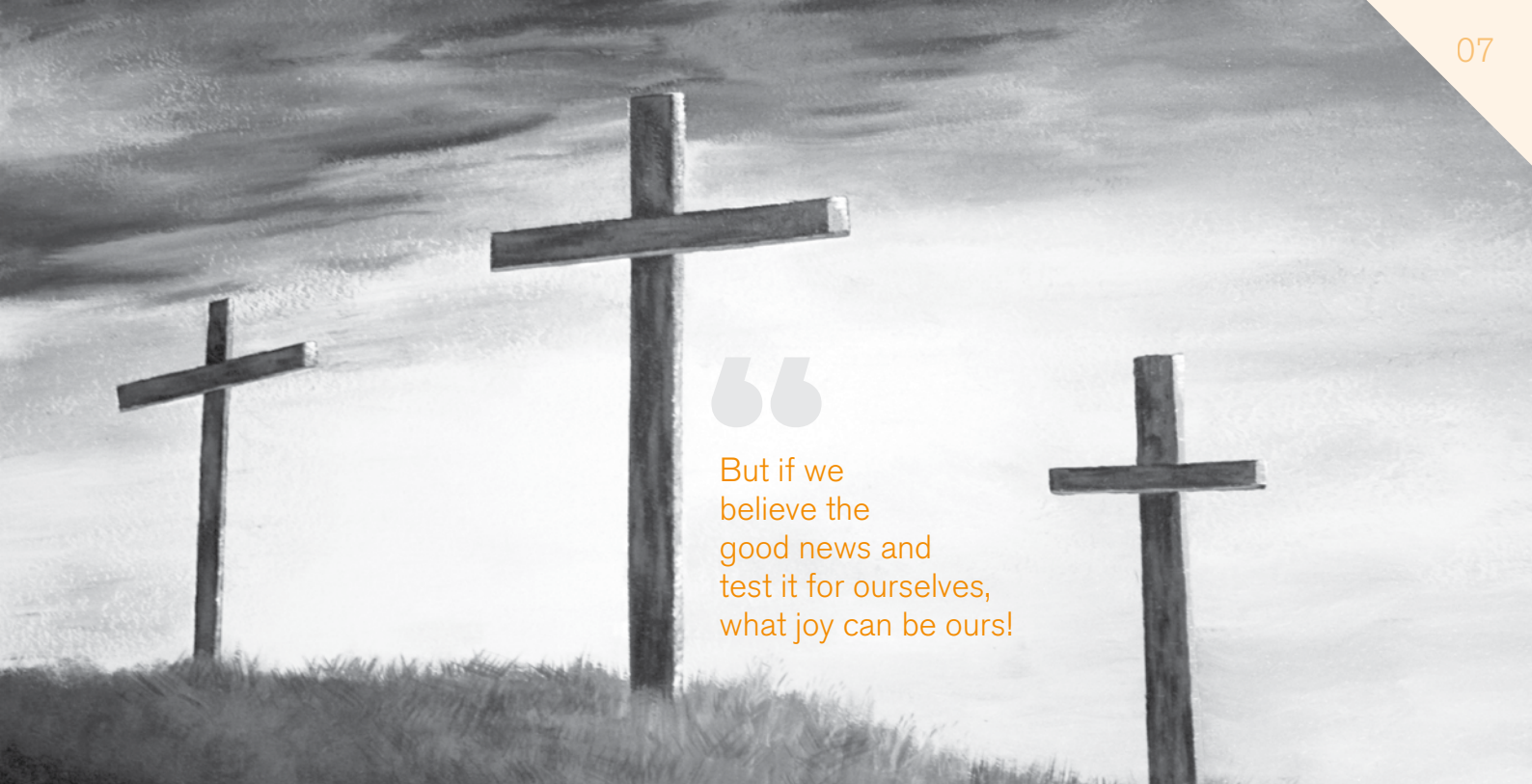
ALL WORTH THINGS ARE - IF YOU

They returned and entered into another tent, took some things from it and hid them also.

Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves... Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace" (2 Kings 6:24-25; 7:1-9).

At first the bearers of such good news were not believed. It was too good to be true. But when it was decided to test out the report, there were overwhelming hallelujahs. People wept for joy as they feasted on the abundant food left by the retreating soldiers. (God had caused the enemy to hear the sound of a great advancing army in the night and they had fled.)

This story is a miniature Bible. Our wonderful guide book is a *multum in parvo* – 'much in little'. Here we have thousands of years and the whole world presented in miniature. When Satan was expelled from heaven, he made his attack on this world. As a result, most inhabitants were soon eating garbage and dying. But God accomplished a miraculous deliverance: the enemy fled and there was an abundance of delicacies and good things for those who had been starving. And it was lepers who brought the good news (the gospel).



But if we
believe the
good news and
test it for ourselves,
what joy can be ours!

WHILE ARE YOURS U BELIEVE

Without the deliverance accomplished by our Saviour, we must wither and die eternally. But if we believe the good news and test it for ourselves, what joy can be ours! Lepers found the treasure – men who knew they had nothing to expect but death, men without weapons or armour, influence or power. Only those who recognise themselves as lepers in heaven's sight find the gospel treasure. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. . . You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:27-30).

Spurgeon, in his *Treasury of the Old Testament*, volume 1, offers some wonderful comments on this story. Here are some of them:

Here was a great work of God, which was entirely unknown. [The Aramean army had retreated but the besieged did not know.] The Lord Jesus has come into the world, and has put away the sins of his people; and yet

many of them are complaining that sin can never be put away. The Lord has routed all the enemies of his people, and yet they are afraid of innumerable evils. None is left to harm them, but they do not remember that the Lord reigns; they are afraid of this, and afraid of that, and yet in one tremendous battle the Champion of the cross has routed all their foes. They are no longer shut up as prisoners: the Lord has brought them liberty; but they are not aware of it by reason of their unbelief. This unbelief darkens our sun at midday. Our unbelief is our worst enemy.

The deliverance was solemnly promised, grievously needed, and yet not a soul believed in it.

Those who are most conscious of sin, most despised of men, and least likely to be favoured, are most often the keenest observers of Jehovah's grace.

When it is all over with us, and we can do no more, then man's extremity is God's opportunity. How much better the Lord was to them than their fears.

Do you feel besieged? Does it seem all over with you? Listen: you were delivered 2000 years ago. You need only believe and receive. As I Corinthians 3:21-22 tells us: All things are ours; the world to come may be had for nothing. Heaven and all its joys are yours, the moment you believe it is true.

DES FORD

Founder, Good News Unlimited

Dr Desmond Ford is the founder of Good News Unlimited. He is preeminently an evangelist and theologian, and has preached, published and spoken on radio in many countries around the world for over 60 years. Above all, Des Ford has a vibrant enthusiasm for his chosen work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

IS THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL GOOD NEWS?

PART 2: WHO IS THE GOD OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL?*



The god of the prosperity gospel is a seemingly attractive god. This god, after all, is poised to shower material and physical blessings upon you. All that you need to do is to 'pull the lever'. That 'lever' might be that you have to pray harder, believe harder, work harder, and very often... give harder.

This version of religion is attractive for two reasons. First of all, it tells you that you are going to get what you want here on earth. Secondly, it reassures you that getting it is in some way within your control. In part 1 of this series, we saw that this is not at all what the Bible tells us about Jesus' teachings, his example or that of his followers. The God of the New Testament is not the God of the prosperity gospel.

I want to take a look at what the God of the prosperity gospel is like.

So who is the god of the prosperity gospel?

He is a God whom we can manipulate. If we do the right actions, then he will fulfill our material wishes on this earth. It is legalism of the worst kind. There is no gospel in it. It is totally bankrupt.

I will tell you what the god of the prosperity gospel is like.

He is like a slot machine... a gambling machine... so we think that the more money we put in, the better our chances of becoming rich.

My God is not a slot machine.

My God is the one of whom it is said,

Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11, NIV)

Jesus came face to face with the key elements of the prosperity gospel several times, notably right at the beginning and the end of his ministry. At those two points he unmasked the god of the prosperity gospel. So now we need never doubt who that false god is. You see, Christ himself faced the temptation of the prosperity gospel head on! Oh yes, he did!

In the gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, verses 9–10, we read that,

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

This is the third and greatest temptation of Christ in the wilderness, by which Christ demonstrated his supremacy and authority over the devil.

* In Part 1 of this series in the September issue of this magazine, I looked at whether there are Biblical models for those who believe the prosperity gospel. In the final and third article in this series, I will look at how to receive the blessings of the gospel.

The devil showed our Lord all the kingdoms of this world and all of their wealth, and he said to him, "I will give it all to you... all of it... if you will bow down and worship me."

Christ rebuked him, and announced that worship is due to the Lord God only. In other words, the riches of this world are not an accessory to the worship of God; they do not go together with it; instead they stand in starkest contrast to it.

You see, the devil came to Jesus preaching the prosperity gospel. When you reject the gospel that promises you material blessings in this life, you are rejecting the devil himself. It is the devil himself who is the god of the prosperity gospel. To follow that bankrupt gospel is to worship the fallen Lucifer.

“In other words, the riches of this world are not an accessory to the worship of God; they do not go together with it; instead they stand in starkest contrast to it.

Again, at the end of his earthly life, Christ faced the allure of the prosperity gospel head-on. He could choose earthly popularity and power and riches. Or he could surrender everything and go to the agony and ignominy of the cross. And there in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he stared into the blackness, he had a foretaste of the horror that would cause him to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

The reality that there is a gospel to preach today is grounded in the fact that Jesus concluded by praying, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

The cross throws every question and all theology into stark relief. Do you think that avoiding the cross was no temptation to Jesus in his humanity? Then count the drops of blood that he sweated in the garden for you! And so the story of Calvary is the great question of "whom will you serve?" Your Heavenly Father? Or the false God of this world?

In the Roman Empire in the time of Christ, slaves were often branded on the face with the identifying mark of the owner. If we have entered into the kingdom of God, then we are slaves of Christ, as the apostle Paul so often tells us. We have been purchased and forever marked by his redeeming blood – not on our faces, but in our hearts.

Beware that the mark you carry is not the dollar sign or any other mark of the kingdom of this world. For the god of the prosperity gospel is Lucifer himself.

If we are Christians and we have been crucified with Christ, then we will be true followers of Christ, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). Oh yes, the joy will come, and even on this earth, but it will be a different and far greater joy than any that the prosperity gospel can offer!

▼ ELIEZER GONZALEZ

Senior Pastor,
Good News Unlimited

Eliezer Gonzalez is the Senior Pastor and CEO of Good News Unlimited. He is an international speaker and author, and is simply passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eliezer has done a bit of study in theology and also in early Christian history. He lives on the sunny Gold Coast in Australia, with his astonishingly beautiful wife Ana, two teenage children whom he never, ever embarrasses, and a crazy dog called Theo.



IS THE GOSPEL JUST FOR THE IGNORANT AND WEAK?

When I first attended a secular university, I was bombarded with arguments that challenged the gospel of Jesus Christ. Belief was not taken seriously. In fact, it was often mocked. Faith was dismissed as being nothing more than a 'crutch'. It was argued that an intelligent and informed person no longer needed to believe in such fairytales. It was time to abandon these primitive and outdated notions and grow up.

Where did such ideas originate? How can a believer respond to these criticisms? Can we have confidence in Jesus Christ?

Sigmund Freud stated that "religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from its readiness to fit in with our instinctual, wishful impulses."¹ In developing his theories, Freud drew inspiration from the writings of the 19th century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach who had asserted that "Man is the beginning, the centre and the end of religion".²

It is critical to note that Freud and Feuerbach start with the assumption that God does not exist. The idea of God is just an illusion or wish fulfilment. Freud argues that the idea of God is simply a psychological projection. We project those attributes and characteristics that we admire onto an imaginary being. If we want someone who will love us, we will invent a God who loves us. If we want someone who will protect us and take revenge on our enemies, then we invent a God who does exactly that. People believe in God, not because he is real, but because they wish that he was real. It is thus argued that belief in God is irrational and only the ignorant and weak would believe in such an outdated idea.

Freud's theories may have some merit if God does NOT exist. However, if God DOES exist, they completely fall apart. If Jesus Christ rose from the grave and lives today, then the critics are silenced.

The problem for the critics is that they assume that God does not exist. This is something that cannot be proven. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that God does exist. This evidence takes many forms and involves many questions.



How is it that the physical laws of the universe are so finely balanced that only the tiniest of changes would make the existence of the universe impossible?

Why is there something rather than nothing? Where did the universe come from? How is it that the physical laws of the universe are so finely balanced that only the tiniest of changes would make the existence of the universe impossible? How do we account for the design that is apparent in nature? In the cell? In DNA? On what basis do we tell the difference between right and wrong, good and evil? How do we explain the accurate fulfilment of the many prophecies in Christian Scripture, prophecies that were often written centuries before their various fulfilments. What about the prophecies that point to the life and work of Jesus Christ? What about the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

¹ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1933), 35

² Quoted by Alister McGrath in *Bridge-Building* (IVP, 1992)



However, the critic may counter and argue that Freud's theory is valuable in identifying the motivation that many have in their search for God. Undoubtedly, there are many people who are attracted to the idea of a God who loves them; to a God who will deal with the problem of evil and suffering; to a God who provides meaning and the promise of a glorious future.

But just because we can identify an underlying motivation, does this mean that we can explain away the reality behind that motivation? For example, if I suffer a heart attack and want to be rushed to hospital, it will not be difficult to explain my motivation for wanting to go to hospital. But just because somebody can explain why I want to go to hospital does not somehow mean that hospitals do not exist. It is the same with God. My ability to explain why someone desires to believe in God does not disprove that God exists.

The good news is that the gospel stands up to the critic. It stands up even under close examination. It makes perfect sense that we are attracted to Jesus Christ. It makes perfect sense that we find his Good News life-changing and death-conquering. We can be confident in the promises of Scripture. As the most prolific writer of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, wrote: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?...But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:55, 57 NIV).

Jesus Christ promises that we can have victory, even over death. This is for real, not some wishful projection. Moreover, we can be confident that we will never be separated from the love of God: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future,

nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39 NIV).

If God is real, it is logical and reasonable to believe in him. The truth of the gospel is not based on our psychological needs. Certainly it meets our needs, but our needs do not determine the truth or otherwise of the gospel. So, is the gospel JUST for the ignorant and weak? NO! Is the Gospel for the ignorant and weak? YES! And, of course, it is also for the intelligent and strong. The Gospel is for everybody.

DR PHILIP RODIONOFF
Friend of Good News Unlimited

Philip Rodionoff is a medical doctor who has a special interest in nutritional and preventive medicine. He also holds a Master's degree in Religion and has presented in many parts of the world on evidences for the Christian faith. He is the co-author of the Davinci Decode. He is happily married with three children and lives on the Gold Coast in Australia.



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THE CHURCH TO BELONG

Christian churches have a variety of different cultures. In some churches people show respect by wearing their shoes, in others they show respect by leaving their shoes at the door. Some churches sing ancient hymns; others sing modern gospel songs. Some churches recite the same written prayers every week; in others the prayers are spontaneous. In some churches they practice foot washing while in others they fill the sanctuary with incense smoke.

In some churches the clergy wear old-fashioned robes and surpluses, in others the clergy dress in contemporary clothing. The members of some churches won't eat unclean meats; the members of other churches don't even know what unclean meats are. In some churches the people fast for several days every month, in other churches fasting is never mentioned. Some churches treasure their icons; other churches ban them.



What practices should a Christian follow, and what practices are totally unnecessary?

The question is: What practices should a Christian follow, and what practices are totally unnecessary?

The Absolutes

The Christian faith has certain absolutes without which it would not be Christian. Absolutes never change, else they would not be absolutes. Of course, the only original absolute can be God, who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8; 1:10-12). He is the God who does not change (Mal. 3:6). So what are the absolutes of the Christian faith?

In Old Testament times God revealed himself in the Shekinah that dwelt between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. The Most Holy Place represented God's kingdom, and the Ark of the Covenant with its Ten Commandments (1 Kgs. 8:9) and atonement cover (Exod. 31:7) represented God's throne (2 Sam. 6:2; Psa. 99:1). The Ark of the Covenant represented God's throne because it illustrated the two basic principles of God's nature: the Ten Commandments pointed to his righteousness, and the

atonement cover or mercy seat pointed to his mercy. It is on these two absolutes of his nature that his kingdom is founded and his reign established.

Citizenship in God's kingdom has a high price, much higher than any human can pay, for the standard by which all potential citizens are measured is a divine standard, not a human one. Essentially, all citizens are required to be 100% sinless and 100% righteous. There are no exceptions. Not only must we owe God absolutely nothing, we must also be wholly righteous.

This is where the gospel comes in. The New Testament reveals that Jesus, in his death on the Cross, took all our sins and gave us his perfect righteousness in exchange. He became "sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). So not only has our debt been cleared by his atonement for all our sins, but we are declared to be perfectly righteous because the righteousness that he credited to our accounts is not the righteousness of man but "the righteousness of God." No righteousness could be more perfect than that.

With all our sins blotted out, and with 100% righteousness accredited to our accounts, there is nothing to stop us from entering God's kingdom. That is why, when Jesus died, the barrier separating us from God, our sins, was torn aside and we were bidden to come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22). Notice that it is called "the throne of grace" and not "the throne of judgement". This is because Jesus endured that judgement in our place.

Now here is the crunch. We are saved by the absolutes of God's mercy and righteousness alone: absolute remission of all our sins - "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness" (Tit. 2:14), and absolute holiness on our record - "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

In God's eyes there are only two classes of people in the world: the saved and the lost. The saved are saved because they accept God's free gifts of forgiveness and righteousness; the lost are lost because they reject God's free gifts of forgiveness and righteousness.

No matter what denomination we belong to, no matter where we live on Planet Earth, and no matter when we lived on Planet

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Earth (before or after the Cross), we are saved only by the free gifts of God's forgiveness and righteousness, made available to us by the death of Jesus. It is of the utmost importance to note that our salvation is 100% divine; there is not a single thread of human devising in the garment of salvation that the heavenly Father puts upon us.



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The Cultural Variables

So what do we mean by the cultural variables of the Christian faith? The cultural variables are everything else in our religion apart from the absolutes. While the absolutes are divine, the cultural variables are human; while the absolutes never change, the cultural variables do; while we are saved by the free gift of God's absolutes, the cultural variables have no saving value.

It is important to understand that there is a huge difference between the standards of the Ten Commandments and cultural standards, for there is a lot of misunderstanding in this area. The Ten Commandments deal with moral standards like murder, adultery and stealing, while cultural standards deal with non-moral issues such as dress codes, diet standards, and music styles, etc.

Our religious culture changes from place to place and time to time. Remember when women wore skirts down to their ankles, and when it was unacceptable for a man to wear a wedding ring? Remember when a woman dare not go to church without a hat, and when the idea of having 'women elders' was a heresy? Remember when the only acceptable seats in church were pews, and the only acceptable music was 200-year-old hymns composed by Isaac Watts and others of his generation? Our religious culture is continually changing and developing. It is therefore important that we differentiate between our cultural rights and wrongs and the moral rights and wrongs of the Ten Commandments.

Our salvation, however, cannot be dependent upon things so fickle they are acceptable today and unacceptable tomorrow. Nobody will be denied entry to God's kingdom because they attend a church that uses drums in worship, and nobody will miss out on eternal life because they worship God while wearing a necklace or earrings. In some settings, these things may offend cultural sensibilities (as did pushy women in Paul's day, see 1 Cor. 14:34-35), but they are not matters of eternal life or death.

One of the biggest battles the apostles had with Christian converts from Judaism was to teach them the difference between the absolutes of their salvation and the variables of their Hebrew religious culture. The apostle Paul taught that Jewish culture was not a saviour, it was just a school-master to bring the Jews to Christ. The whole sanctuary service pointed to Jesus who alone was able to save them. Their religious culture, however, had no power to save them; it was but a signpost pointing to the Saviour.

Nevertheless, there were Jews in the early church who firmly believed in the saving value of their religious culture. They said to the Gentile converts, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Unfortunately, both Peter and Barnabas were led astray by these teachers, because they did not understand the difference between the divine absolutes and the human variables. The apostle Paul, who did understand the difference between the absolutes and variables, rebuked them for requiring the "Gentiles to follow Jewish customs" (Gal. 2:14-16).



The Ten Commandments deal with moral standards...while cultural standards deal with non-moral issues...

For Paul, salvation is by Jesus and Jesus alone. It is Jesus plus nothing. According to him, Jesus plus anything else, including circumcision, was a damnable heresy (Gal. 1:6-9). Salvation is by Christ alone, and is received through faith alone.

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Now, if a number of ex-Muslims, who had become true disciples of Jesus, decided to build a worship centre that looked like a mosque, and if their spiritual leader called the people to worship from a loudspeaker in the minaret, and if this building had tiled floors and no seating, and if the members sang hymns in Arabic and knelt on their prayer mats and touched their heads to the floor, then their entrance into God's kingdom would be no less grand than that of any other saint, for their salvation depends solely on Jesus and not upon their culture.

Let us never make the mistake of mingling the human with the divine. Salvation is all of God and nothing of man. It is a free gift and cannot be earned or merited. It is called "the gift of God"

(Rom. 6:23) and "the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17). We can accept it, or reject it.

▼ **RITCHIE WAY**
Editor, Good News Unlimited

Pr Ritchie Way served as a missionary, church administrator and pastor. He earned a BA in theology, and in 1985 he graduated with an MA in religion. Ritchie has, for the past decade, been the Executive Editor for the South Pacific Good News Unlimited magazines. Ritchie is a director of Good News Unlimited Ltd, and a published author.



IS GOD INTERESTED IN OUR HEALTH?

Jesus Christ declared that "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). When I think of a full glass of water, I think of water brimming to the very top, so no more can possibly fit in. In the same way, Jesus came that we might have life to the full.

Although this passage is often applied spiritually, it encompasses more than this. God is the creator of the physical body, and he declared that it was very good. I am awestruck by the human body's intricate design. We are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

Where does health fit into this? Although our health is not the basis of our acceptance by God, God is certainly honoured if we look after our health. The effects of good health are numerous: greater energy, greater potential to engage in worthwhile activities and participate in community, greater clarity of thought, greater openness to connect with God. After all, God communicates with us through our minds.

Medical science identifies a strong connection between the body and the mind; each affects the other. If we maintain good physical health, our minds are more likely to be healthy.

There is more to a full life than physical health. Total Health encompasses physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health. By enjoying Total Health, we are able to participate more fully in the life that God originally intended for us. Indeed, it makes sense that God is interested in our health.

▼ **DR PHILIP RODIONOFF**

Editorial Note – This is the first of what will be a regular column on health by Dr Rodionoff, whose special medical area of interest is nutritional and preventative medicine.



LETTERS *from our readers*

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



Salvation and the Judgement

Hi Ritchie,

I have been digesting G.E. Ladd's "A Theology of the New Testament", particularly the section on "Rewards and Grace." I have to confess that I feel very uncomfortable about the concept of 'rewards' in the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps you might like to comment on this issue.

W. S.

Hi W.

Eternal life, as you know, is not a reward but "the gift of God" (Rom. 6:23). The gospel clearly teaches that eternal life comes by God's grace and not by works (Rom. 3:21-23; Gal. 2:15-16). This free gift from God is the root of our salvation. Our works, on the other hand, are the fruit of our salvation. (See Matt. 25:31-46.)

Some people with the root of salvation have very few good works. They will be saved, but their rewards will be small. Others, like the apostle Paul who wrote half the New Testament and established churches all around the Mediterranean, will have great rewards. Their treasure in heaven will be the multitudes of people saved through their ministry. On the other hand, the one talent man of Matthew 25 had no fruit because he had no root, so there will be no place in the kingdom for him.

Jesus said, "The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12). Both the righteous and the unrighteous will be rewarded according to what they have done. While those who repent of their evil deeds will be forgiven and admitted to the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-11), in the final judgement they will still have to face up to the damage they caused to other people. Even though they are saved they will still have to stand in judgement (2 Cor. 5:10). But their judgement will be full of mercy, and the outcome will be a blessing.



Jews and Gentiles

Dear Editor,

The other day, when I was talking with a friend about a religious matter, I mentioned that there has only ever been one way of salvation from Adam's time to the present, and that even people before the cross were saved by the death of the Lamb of God that was slain "from the beginning of the world." My friend, however, maintains the belief that Jews had a different basis for their salvation, as they were saved by their faithful observance of the law. Not being a biblical scholar I was not able to contradict her. But you mentioned in your article on the three angels' messages that the gospel of salvation is 'an eternal gospel' because it covers all human history. Would you please expand on this a little?

S. D.

Dear S.

When God demonstrated to Peter and six Jewish Christians that he accepted the Gentiles purely on the basis of their faith in Jesus, Peter and his fellow brothers went up to Jerusalem to report this to the church leaders.

It is interesting that Peter didn't say the Gentiles were saved just as they were; he said, "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we [Jews] are saved, just as they [Gentiles] are" (Acts 15:11). Both Jews and Gentiles are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Peter asserted that God "made no distinction between us [Jews] and them" (Acts 15:9).

The law never preceded salvation, not even in the giving of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are prefaced by the words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod. 20:2). These very first words the Lord inscribed on the stone tablets reveal that salvation always comes before obedience. We obey because we are saved. We are not saved because we obey, and neither were the Jews.



The Christmas Star

Ritchie,

While reading through the four Gospels again, as I try to do every year, I came across the passage about the star of Bethlehem. A new star appeared in the west and the Magi who saw it understood it to be the sign of the promised Messiah of Israel.

I read this passage in Matthew 2 twice because it did not seem to say what I had been taught as a child – that the Magi followed that star all the way from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem. For example, if they followed this star, why did it take the star two years to get them from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem?

C. T.

Dear C.

You are quite right. There is no passage that says the star led them all the way from their homeland to Israel. They knew the way to Israel, so didn't need a star to guide them on that journey. What they didn't know was where to find the Messiah once they got to Israel. That was when the star that they had seen from the east appeared again to show them the way.

And, as you said, if the star indicated the birth of the Messiah, its appearance two years before their arrival in Jerusalem (Matt. 2:2, 16), indicated that Jesus would have been about two years of age at the time of their visit. Apparently Joseph and Mary had stayed on in Bethlehem after Jesus' birth, which is why they were living in a house there at the time of the Magi's visit (Matt. 2:9-11).



The Adversary

Dear Editor,

When I am reading the Gospels I try to understand the relationship between the passage I'm reading and the one immediately following it. But try as I may, I cannot see any relationship between Jesus' criticism of the people for their failure to interpret the present time and their need to be reconciled to their adversary who will drag them off to court (Luke 12:54-59). Any ideas?

C. M.

Dear C.

Jesus was telling the people that they could predict rain and hot wind by signs in the physical realm, but they were blind to the signs in the spiritual realm; they could accurately foretell the weather, but they failed to see the day of the Messiah. On that score, they were making a bad judgement.

These people, who were unjustly condemning Jesus, needed to be careful that they weren't making a wrong call, for if they were wrong, he, as their adversary, would take them to a Judge who would punish them most severely. The only solution was for them to "try hard to be reconciled to him on the way" to the court.

The time in which we live is the time to be reconciled with Jesus. It will be too late for us when we enter the time of judgement.



NO FREE LUNCH

Some time back I sold my business to a good Christian man. When needed, I would return to help him. He had a large extended family of fourteen, including ten children. When his people mover needed replacing he hoped to purchase an 18 seat bus which was to be auctioned in Sydney about 2½ hours away. He paid his local motor mechanic to inspect the vehicle and when a perfect report came back, the man asked me to run the office so he could attend the auction and bid on the vehicle. He told me what he was prepared to pay for it.

The next day I asked him if he got the bus. When he replied, "No," I asked what price it was sold for and was told he just didn't get it. There was a longer story and eventually he related it. The bidding had started really low and after three bids he realised that just he and another person, a Salvation Army officer, were bidding. Realising the officer wanted it for God's work, my friend, (not a member of the Salvation Army), stopped bidding and let him have it at a little over half of what he was prepared to pay.

Rather than being disappointed, he was sorry he had not noticed who was bidding earlier so the Salvation Army officer could have paid less. Not being able to purchase that bus cost my friend dearly. But sacrifices like this are normal for Christians redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They do not earn us salvation, but they testify that we have been saved. Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

The popular saying 'there's no such thing as a free lunch' originated in the late 1800's, when US saloons offered free meals to patrons who purchased liquor. The patrons soon realised that the cost of their liquor more than covered the value of their lunch. Today, the proliferation of scams and questionable advertising keeps this old adage relevant. You often hear: "If you buy this..., we'll give you this... completely free." Have you ever asked yourself, "Who exactly will be paying for this freebie?"

What about the gospel? Is salvation really a free gift? Many passages in the Bible tell us that it is most definitely a free gift. In Ephesians 2:8 we read: "For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast."

This gift is free to the receiver but it cost the giver everything. The price Jesus paid for our salvation by dying on the cross is barely understood, even by Christians. That he who created the universe would allow the people he created to execute him, is hard to grasp. That he was prepared to give up everything for our sakes is even harder to understand. But he did it.

▼ **GEOFF REILLY**

Friend of Good News Unlimited



OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY

GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP - Milton, Brisbane

GNU meetings are held every Saturday from 2:15pm to 4:00pm, at the auditorium behind the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) building at 237 Milton Road, Brisbane, Australia.

People are invited to come earlier and bring their lunch, beginning at 12:30pm.

After lunch, our pastor, Eliezer Gonzalez, holds a Bible discussion and prayer, beginning at 1:15pm.

Our main presentation commences at 2:15pm.

FELLOWSHIPS AROUND THE WORLD

So far, 22 fellowships in 12 countries have affiliated with GNU to help people find a gospel fellowship near them. All meeting details can be found on our website.

STORIES

Some truly inspirational, encouraging and heart-warming stories have been shared by those in our global community. Go to *Global Community - Stories* - Read Stories on our website goodnewsunlimited.com to read some. We'd also love to hear your story so please share!



**FIND US ON
FACEBOOK AND
TWITTER LIKE
THOUSANDS OF
PEOPLE ARE DOING
AROUND THE WORLD!**

INTO ALL THE WORLD

IS IT ALL JUST SPIN?



Eliezer Gonzalez
Senior Pastor, Good News Unlimited

Dear Friend, I was recently asked on the telephone by one of GNU's wonderful supporters whether the stories we print in our magazine and newsletter are true or whether they are all just 'spin' ('Spin' is a colloquial expression and commonly refers to a message that is deceptive or exaggerated in some way to suit the purposes of the author.)

Are the gospel stories just spin? Are the stories of the Book of Acts just spin? Of course not, yet their first hearers would have received them with initial disbelief.

Here is the truth (no spin!). We are almost daily receiving so many wonderful stories and making such progress under the power of God that we have space in our print publications to include just a fraction of what is happening. It is only through social media such as Facebook and on our website that we are able to publish more of what God is doing through your gifts and prayers!

But whatever marvelous things are happening in the spread of the gospel, still that is not enough. We want to see more of the Spirit of God. We want to see more people reached for the gospel. We want to see more lives transformed. We want to see Jesus come again soon.

Is it all just spin? I am reminded again of the words that God used when he called me to this ministry in Good News Unlimited:

Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you. – Acts 13:41.

The more friends who me ring up and ask me if what the Lord is doing is true, the more I sense that we are indeed living in those days spoken about by the prophet. And I love it when you encourage me in the Lord!

My phone number is +61 413 473 043.

Grace and Peace

▼ **ELIEZER GONZALEZ**

Senior Pastor, Good News Unlimited

