



JESUS
PLUS
ZERO

*Bearing
the sins
of the world*

GILLIAN FORD

JESUS + 0

(Jesus Plus Zero)

GILLIAN FORD

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Religion/Christian life/devotional

ISBN-13: 978-1506186115

ISBN-10: 1506186114

A copy of this book may be found in the National Library of Australia

Religion / Christian life / Devotional

Cover design: Darren Baker & Gillian Ford

Image: Canstock

Typeface (text): Minion Pro

These books may be ordered through www.amazon.com,
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Gillian Ford is the wife of Dr. Desmond Ford.

DEDICATION

To the Christian women of Rwanda,
particularly those who meet in gospel cells
in Rwanda, Belgium and Sweden.

FOREWORD

HAVING HEARD OF the work of David Kayumba in Brussels, Belgium, and his gospel friends in Africa and India, I wondered what I might do for them, particularly for the women. I thought I could write a small devotional book about the gospel. This is based on **some of the things I learned in my husband's classes** at Avondale College in Cooranbong, NSW, Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as those of Dr Norman Young, a New Testament scholar who also beautifully enunciated that gospel to us students. I began **with some of the great verses in Paul's Epistles** and went on as the Spirit moved me.

There are three or four articles in this book based on events in Mediaeval and Early Modern British history, and readers will perhaps wonder about that. The reason is that I have studied history at university in recent years, and these are subjects that have interested me. Also this crucial British religious history has had a great impact on British church missions to Africa, so it may be of interest to some.

I was a new Christian in 1966 when I went to Avondale College, having been born in England. My family emigrated to New Zealand in 1961, and I lived in both the south and north islands until I went to Australia. I did not know anybody at Avondale College, except a girl called Eunice Phillips whom I met on the train travelling from Sydney. She was from Manchester in England and had also just arrived to go to Avondale College. We became roommates.

In my first year's training to be a Bible instructor I was in Dr. Desmond Ford's *Daniel and Revelation* class. After that first

year, the college dropped the Bible worker's course. They were reluctant to send young women out at night in the cities, and so I switched to teaching, later upgrading to do a B.A. in Education. I majored in French and German, which combination was only offered for the two years I studied.

This choice was to be providential when we married, because Des and I and the family travelled almost immediately to Manchester, England, where he studied for his second doctorate under the great evangelical scholar, Dr F. F. Bruce. **Much of Des's research was in the German language and some in French, and I was able to do many hours of translation for him. I have now forgotten almost all my German, but it was providentially useful at the time. I also typed Des's thesis, and later I retyped it for publication. At that time there were no home computers.**

Over the years Des and I have worked together on many writing projects, and I built on those skills. I worked as a typesetter in secular print shops and for a couple of local journals. For ten years, I prepared the *Good News Unlimited Magazine* for publication in USA and wrote children's stories for it.

While Des was denominationally employed, various publishing houses happily accepted his work. When he was removed from ministry, both his denomination and the religious world at large would not publish his books. By the broad religious world he was seen as still belonging to his original denomination, and because he kept the Sabbath and did not believe in the doctrine of everlasting torment, he was kept out of a broader ministry. This is why we began publishing our own books in the 1980s.

Such is the prejudice against the preaching of the gospel in every church that a person of such great talent and spirituality

as Des was shunned and sidelined. I have often wondered about it. It never made any real sense. But the thought that I have mentioned elsewhere, that our work down here is done in sackcloth and ashes, is very comforting. So they treated our Master, the Lord Jesus, and thus they may treat you. Do not be surprised.

It is a continual source of amazement to me that the love of **God and the preaching of Christ's gospel can be so threatening** to organised religion. It is as unimaginable as the way Jesus himself was despised and rejected. To me it is evidence that God exists, because the preaching of righteousness by faith—Jesus plus zero—creates such opposition. How could it be that the love of God and his free gift cause such a backlash from proud, sinful hearts, if there were not something divine, superhuman and powerful about the gospel?

Despite rejection in some quarters, we have been greatly blessed by knowing some of the best people in the world. We have many friends all over the world, who love the gospel supremely and have supported our ministry in an amazing way. The 1970s were tremendously exciting times with the preaching of righteousness by faith. The 1980s onwards were exciting in another way as opposition came. Always God has been faithful and blessed us.

Since we 'retired' and came back to Australia in 2000, Des and I have published (added to the other books completed in USA) thirteen books, and I am about to work on an abridged version of a recent book. We have been as busy as ever, but the time is coming when we will have to slow down. Like many others our lives have had their joys and difficulties, but God has been very good to us. In comparison to our brothers and sisters in Rwanda our lives have been a breeze.

With all this writing we have been sowing for a future har-

vest. Our efforts are useless without the mighty spark of the Spirit of God moving on the hearts of men and women. We pray for this and we invite you to pray for the same. Without Him we can do nothing.

Reader, may the thoughts in this book be a blessing to you. May you come to know and love Christ. And may his gospel mean everything to you.

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THE MAN OF SORROWS

Isaiah 53:5: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

ISAIAH 53 WAS written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. This chapter is the last of the four Songs of the Suffering Servant. It tells the story of a 'Man of Sorrows', who knows all there is to know about grief.

Christians look back and believe Isaiah 53 predicted the coming of Jesus the Messiah (the anointed one). There is nobody but Christ who fits the description so well. Those who see Jesus there look at texts such as these: 'He was taken from prison and from judgment'; 'he was cut off out of the land of the living', and 'for the transgression of my people was he stricken' (53:8, KJV). Whoever this chapter was addressed to at the time of writing, Jesus is certainly there.

Our verse 5 states that he was pierced for our transgressions. Could the idea of crucifixion be any better expressed? The nails pierced Christ's wrists and feet as they held him to the Cross. The Roman knife cleaved his side in order to make sure he was dead. Our innocent Saviour was crushed by the weight of our sins. At Calvary, in his humanity, Jesus became our substitute and died the death we owe because of our iniquities. On the Cross Jesus was 'the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world' (John 1:29).

The idea of substitution is often used about the death of Jesus in the Bible. It means that his immaculate life and his atoning death were given in place of yours and mine. In fact the whole

of humanity is suggested by the word ‘we’ (by his wounds we are healed). The Cross of Christ calls for the world’s attention, because we sinners were all there in our substitute, the Lord Jesus. Calvary was the apex of history. All else flows to it or from it.

The **‘punishment that brought us peace was on him’**. Are there any more comforting words than this for the sinner? We look at the world news, and the news is uniformly bad. There illustrated is the sad state of humanity. We see war, pain, natural disasters, murder, death by accident and intent, rape, mutilation, incest, bullying, deceit and betrayal everywhere.

Every day the news describes terrible events in every land. These events pass into history leaving only heartache and sad memories. Every day new tragedies arrive to replace those that have passed. There is very little good news in this world. There is also a sense of guilt from enjoying life while our brothers and sisters suffer in other places. But amid the difficulties and disasters of this life there is a place of calm. It abides in the mind of God. Through Christ we can live above this world in perfect peace, and nothing need trouble our souls. This is because, by his life and death, Christ has taken our punishment and given us the **‘peace that passes understanding’ (Phil. 4:7)**.

Your life may have been very sinful, you may have lived all your days for yourself, you may have been a blatant sinner, you may be a very injured soul—but, **‘by the wounds of Christ, we are healed’**. So **here is that** remarkable exchange given us by God in Christ. Jesus receives the punishment, and he suffers the wounds. We are given the peace and the healing.

Do not just take the peace and healing and keep it all to yourself, or like the manna it will become rancid. The gospel is the gift that keeps on giving. The wonderful thing is that it is free, without price. You can pass it on.

THE JEWEL OF JUSTIFICATION

Romans 4:25: He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

JUSTIFICATION—HERE IS a main word the Bible uses to describe how God saves us. Substitution, salvation, sanctification, representation, reconciliation, propitiation, and redemption are others. They all have slightly different meanings. The Apostle Paul is helping us to understand a jewel that has many facets. Together these words give us a more complete picture of the whole idea of how God saves us.

But the word ‘justification’ is very special, because it is the one most used, and because it tells us how God saves us according to the law. Justification is a word from the law court. It is part of the process of judgment. It has the opposite meaning of condemnation in the Bible. Condemnation means to declare somebody guilty. Its opposite ‘justification’ means to declare somebody innocent, as though they had never sinned. By his sacrifice, God permits us to be acquitted from guilt in this life and the life to come. More than that, he imputes to us the righteousness of Christ.

People may say, ‘oh if God only declares us not guilty, it is not really true’. It’s a fiction! Such people think we must be perfect in this life and not commit any sins. But anyone who is realistic knows perfection (sinlessness) is not possible in this life. Perfectionists think the word ‘perfect’ in the King James’ Version of the Bible means sinless, but it doesn’t. This is Old English, and at the time it was written 500 years ago, ‘perfect’ meant ‘mature’.

We are called to be mature Christians, but sinlessness is only an aim in this life. Some of the people who think they are perfect and talk about it a lot turn out to have open sin in their lives. I have met some of them. It must be quite disappointing for them to realise they are not perfect, but possibly they overlook their failures and make excuses for them. They need eye salve to give them sight and insight. Pray for such to experience and see their need of forgiveness, because they can be very hard on their brethren and they fight the gospel.

On the other hand, the people who genuinely come to Christ, and see in part the reality of their sinfulness, know they will never be fully perfect until Jesus comes and changes them at the Resurrection. Their only hope is trust in Jesus, and the word **‘justification’ is given us to comfort us and give us hope, faith and love to help us to grow in grace. We know that being justified is the only way we can ever get into God’s kingdom.**

How it works is this. Jesus has paid the price of our sins—**yesterday’s, today’s and tomorrow’s**—on the Cross. The penalty for our sin has been paid for at Calvary. It is past, it is finished, it is outside ourselves, it is absolute, it is real. This is a group salvation—potentially the whole human race has been saved. The individual accesses this grace by faith, and what is potentially true for the whole world becomes true for me.

I, the sinner, come to him, drawn by His Spirit, attuned to **my guilt, and pleading for mercy. God looks at Christ’s sinless life on earth and his atoning death instead of looking at me. On the basis of what Jesus has done, God justifies me the sinner. He declares me righteous for Christ’s sake. There is no merit in my offering to God, it is all of Christ.**

I can only accept God’s salvation through faith, and even faith is given me. It is the empty hand that reaches out to take the gift of God.

Hallelujah, Lord, here I am a sinner. Thank you for the loving sacrifice of my Lord Jesus Christ. I extend the hand of faith to take the gift. I now know that you are merciful and declare me righteous despite my shortcomings. You have raised me to new life and declared me clean. May your love fill my life and spread out through me to all your children.

THE TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION

2 Corinthians 2:14: But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

THINK OF A procession following Jesus. He is there at the head carrying a cross in front. His body is bowed, his head, wreathed in a crown of thorns, is covered in blood. He staggers to his death. Behind him follow his children. There does not seem much triumph here.

Over there we see a leper defiled from swellings, deformities and scabs. His body is full of sores. He has been declared unclean and has lived a life of isolation, scorned by his fellow men. But Jesus has declared him clean, and so he is following Jesus in this great parade. He is looking outside himself and following the love.

Here is Mary Magdalene. She was poor, forced into prostitution and used badly by men. Her hair is bedraggled, and **her garments are torn. But she loved Jesus and saved a year's wages to buy a jar of precious ointment to anoint his feet.** He saw her great heart and accepted her into his kingdom. Mary is triumphant here.

There is Zaccheus. He was a tax collector, and the people hated him because he took their money. But he had heard about Jesus and hid up in a tree. Jesus passed by and called him down. **'Zaccheus, I plan to eat with you'**. He has forsaken all to follow Jesus, happy to follow his master.

And here's a man with tears running down his face. He was

there at Christ's death and he denied him three times. Like Judas, he thought of suicide, but Jesus passed by and looked him in the eyes. Peter marches behind his Lord because of a loving, saving look.

And there is King David. He stole a **man's wife and sent the husband** to the front of the battle to be killed. He lost his beloved son Absalom, mourning that he could not die for him. He also marches in the procession, walking along at the back with the meek and lowly.

This is not a flood of people following a popular politician. It is **made up of the few, the weak and the despised**. God's work down here is done in sackcloth and ashes. It is made up of the **'two or three who gather together'**. It is not about pomp and **glory and success**. It's a **path of humility and, sometimes, apparent failure**.

Our sins are not all the same, but we are all alike; sinners. There is very little that is attractive about our lives. We are all conscious of falling short of what we should be and what we **want to be**. And so **'the triumphal procession'** spoken about in this passage does not look victorious down here. It does not seem to reflect present reality, but at first glance describes the **future**. This **'triumphal procession'** is very real, but it's in God's mind, and in this life it is to be imagined. We experience that triumph by faith, not seeing it down here. The Apostle Paul saw the glory of the Cross and understood as few men what it meant. God gifted him the talents to write an explanation of how salvation worked. The truth of the gospel was glorious to him because he saw what Jesus had accomplished as a finished work.

Jesus brought in the end of sin. What? It doesn't seem that way down here. Sin is everywhere, and the evil forces everywhere seem to be winning and persecuting the saints. We

are threatened by dangers from without and within.

But as Paul pointed out, because of the finished work of Christ, we have already died to our sins, we are declared **righteous, we have entered and passed through God's judgment, and we are already raised with Christ and seated in heavenly places.**

And so the triumphal procession, which will take place when Jesus comes back to earth at the Second Coming, with millions of his saints remade in his likeness—is **in Paul's mind already taking place. It's more real than any event on this earth. You are already marching behind a mighty, triumphant and risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

Now we are forgiven saints, let the fragrance of our lives filled with the knowledge of salvation by the Spirit of God and **His Word spread out into the world. Let us invite 'the many' to join God's parade. Keep walking in the light.**

THE YES AND THE AMEN

2 Corinthians 1:20: For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us (KJV)

JESUS IS THE Yes and the Amen to all the promises of God. This is covenant language. Throughout the Old Testament and into the New, God repeatedly made covenants with his chosen people. For instance he made one with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon. When the Hebrews left Egypt after their captivity and God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, God made a covenant with the new nation of Israel.

These covenants were really all the same and typical of those made in other nations between King and subjects. God made promises to certain individuals and groups, and in response he asked the people to be obedient to his commands. He promised blessings to those who kept his requirements, but curses if they disobeyed. These covenants all contained a ceremonial sacrifice to seal the agreement.

In one way or another all these Old Testament covenants were broken, because people either could not or would not obey God. Also, before Christ died, the gospel was not as well understood, and so most people tried to keep the covenant by **their own good deeds. And these good acts weren't good enough**, because they were tainted with human sin.

In Deuteronomy 11:26, Moses told the Israelites that when they entered the Land of Promise, they were to enact a ceremony that acted out the covenant. They were to enter the land of Canaan and place two groups of their people on the opposite mountains of Mount Gerazim and Mount Ebal. The

first group (the yeses) was to proclaim the blessings of the covenant across the valley between the mountains, and the second group (the nos) was to proclaim the curses that would take place if they were to disobey. This was so these things would be committed to memory in the minds of the people.

In the New Testament God has forged a covenant with those who believe in Christ and his sacrifice. Read about it in 2 Corinthians 3:6-17. In a sense the design of the covenant is the same.

It has the same promises and requirements, it has the element of sacrifice, and it is based on obedience. But here it is based on the obedience of Jesus, the righteous one, who knew no sin. He lived a perfect life. He died an atoning death. And both his life and death are offered in the place of the sinner.

Paul made it clear that this covenant is very superior to the **old ones**. He stated: **‘How much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness. For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory’** (vv. 9b-10). When people read Moses,

Paul says, their minds were made dull as though a veil covered their heart.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with **unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.** (vv. 16-18)

These words are profound. The covenant God made with Christ at the foundation of the world to save us was ratified at Calvary by the shedding of the blood of Jesus.

Now God is a covenant partner with Christ, and those

promises are certain. Jesus never fails. He is the 'yes' to God's blessings freely given to those who believe. God can say 'Amen, so let it be' to us, because Jesus was obedient even unto the Cross at Calvary.

HE HAS QUICKENED US

Ephesians 2:1: And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

HERE THE APOSTLE Paul is telling us about the moral state that all men and women are born into. From the time of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, the whole world has been born into a state of sin. It means our moral nature is warped like a sheet of plywood left out in the rain. The word 'trespass' has the idea of walking in a place we should not go. This leads us into temptation and causes us to easily sin.

What we call 'original sin' does not mean that people can only do bad things. We know that people who do not believe in God can be very kind and loving. A good atheist can sometimes perform much better than a bad Christian. Original sin just means that every area of our life is tainted.

Some people have the advantage of loving parents who are good examples. Often they are 'naturally' nice. Many Christians struggle because they have character defects that make them prickly and hard to live with. The church is more a hospital than a showcase. God understands this, and he reads the heart. At the same time he calls us to live for Christ on an ever-rising plane.

In God's sight looking down on the human race there may be people as morally tall as mountains and others as flat as pimples. Under his view, they are all levelled out. The Bible tells us we ALL come short of the glory of God. All our deeds are like filthy rags. We have no reason for pride.

But notice the verse says first 'he has quickened us', and that

is the greatest of news. The sentence is in the past tense, and it means that he made us alive in the past—before we were born.

Yes, he brings us to life when we come to Jesus. This can only take place because Jesus put his arms around the whole human race at Calvary and led them back into a right relationship with God. He could do this because God does not look at us as sinners; he looks at his Son who stands in our place.

Adam the First in the Garden of Eden led the whole world into a state of sin. But Jesus (the Second Adam) set things right and brought us back into a state of **grace**. **‘In the place where he was crucified there was a garden’**—we are back to Eden before **the Fall in God’s estimation**.

Think of these ideas as moving pictures describing salvation history—first what went wrong with the world, and second, how God has set things straight. See it as a timeless panorama across the skies, which any believer can enter into at any time in history by acceptance and faith.

When a person comes to Christ they slot into this state of grace, this finished work. They may not feel it, they will still have shortcomings, but the compass of the life has moved in a new direction and points North towards heaven.

Christ says, this is how I have loved you—will you come home to me? Will you give me your heart? We sinners, tired of the pain, tears and suffering this world offers, accept and sink at his feet in gratitude. He, the great Shepherd, picks up his lost sheep and carries us home on his shoulders.

That Jesus has forgiven all our sins is difficult to understand. Does it mean that now we can go out and commit sin and do anything we like because Jesus saved us at the Cross and will forgive us? No, the person who keeps on sinning deliberately will show that he or she is not truly saved. Such people have not understood the gospel.

We come to Jesus and see his wonderful life and his atoning death, as he took our place before God's judgment bar and poured his life out for our sakes on the Cross. The love of God for undeserving sinners pierces our hearts and causes us to love him and each other.

JOSHUA AND THE HIGH PRIEST

Zechariah 3:1: And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

HERE IN THE Old Testament we have a wonderful picture of what happens in the Final Judgment. Remember, there are lots of stories about the judgment in the Bible, and they are all different. They are each meant to teach us part of the truth. This story is probably the best one in helping us to understand how it is that Jesus **defends us against Satan's accusations and makes us right before God.**

There are three characters here in court—the defender, the Angel of the LORD (also called the LORD and representing Jesus), the accuser Satan, and Joshua the High Priest who stands in the dock and represents the sinner throughout the ages.

Immediately, Jesus challenges Satan about his right to be there. **'Is this not a brand plucked out of the burning?'** We are told that Joshua is wearing filthy rags, and these represent his sinful life and his lack of righteousness. But it also states that he is standing before the angel, and there with Jesus he is safe.

Then Jesus orders the filthy garments to be removed from him, and these are symbols of his wickedness being taken away. Joshua is promised a new change of clothes. And forthwith a **new priest's headdress is placed upon his head, and a change of clothes is put on to cover him.** Jesus is said to be still standing by, and he makes a covenant promise with Joshua to be with him always.

What is so fascinating here is that Satan is there to resist

Jesus, but he doesn't get a word in. Jesus is so busy redeeming Joshua, that Satan has nothing to say.

This is a story full of symbols, and you can tell that because the Angel of the LORD appears to be Jesus and yet the Angel predicts his own future. Note it says: 'I will bring forth my servant the Branch', which refers to the yet future coming of the Messiah. But this shift is permitted in telling stories and should not bother us. Instead we must ask what are the big ideas the story is teaching?

The believer, represented by the priest, is wearing filthy rags, which symbolise a lack of righteousness. Satan is there to resist Jesus and accuse Joshua, but after all his evil doing, the devil's accusations fall away.

Joshua was a believer, a righteous man, but despite that his clothes were still filthy rags. Only Jesus could offer him covering for his sins. And he could only do this because he is going to die for his sins on the Cross. Jesus is going to live a righteous life, and he will die an atoning death on behalf of the human race.

This chapter was written before Jesus was born as a man on earth, but it is a clear picture of what Christ's main work would be as he grew up. He would be in the business of saving people. This chapter also shows that the Cross works backwards to cover all who have ever lived.

The offer of righteousness is not just made to Joshua. It is made to the least of God's children. It is made to you and me. You may feel you don't matter much in a world filled with millions of people. You may think you are not very important. You may feel you are a great sinner. You may have been so abused that it is hard to trust. But in God's eyes we are all his children and we each have eternal worth. He is longing to save you.

When Satan tempts you to think you will not be able to get

through God's Judgment at the end of time, take courage from this story. Satan could say, 'Look at Joshua, he has no righteousness, he's dressed in filthy rags'. And Satan would be right. But Jesus intervenes and says, 'Be silent, Joshua is mine. I died for him. Leave him alone'.

We can have this assurance every day.

MADE TO BE SIN FOR US

2 Corinthians 5:21: For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

HERE IS A verse that is full of gospel. It is a very wonderful passage involving three characters—God, Jesus and you. God is the one who has made Jesus into sin for us. But you must remember God is not forcing Jesus—this is a willing cooperation, which they decided on together from the foundation of the earth. We do not worship three Gods, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are one being with three parts to their nature. Where one is the others are also, but their roles are different.

Paul tells us that Jesus knew no sin. When he came to earth, he felt the effects of sin, and he felt tired as we might. But he was not like us. He remained God but added a second, human nature. He did this so that he could lose his life, because God cannot die.

These are complicated ideas, but what we need to know in **this text is much simpler. You might call it God's divine exchange. Jesus takes our sins upon himself (he doesn't have any), and we are made the righteousness of God (though our righteousness is like Joshua the priest's—filthy rags). In book-keeping terms, Christ's life is put to our account.**

In your mind picture two big stages set out before you. One is black and has a label on it called SINNER, and the other is white and has the label RIGHTEOUS. Now, naturally, if we were directing the play, and Jesus came along we would put him

on the white stage. He is innocent. He never sinned in his life. He is the spotless Lamb of God. And then, let us choose someone to represent humanity—Joshua the High Priest for example. Well, he is dressed in filthy rags, and so he must go on the black stage. That is where we all belong.

We sit back and look at both stages—black and white, representing sin and righteousness. We have the correct people on the correct stage, surely. Jesus **SHOULD** be on the white stage because **he's righteous**, and Joshua **SHOULD** be on the black stage because **he's one of us, and we are all evil**.

But here, who could imagine it—God makes a divine exchange, and suddenly Jesus moves to the black stage and we are taken onto the white stage (of course we have to have the change of clothes first).

Any audience would be moved to tears. How is this fair? How can Jesus the innocent one be seen as guilty, and why should that sinner on the other side escape judgment? But this is the wonderful thing about God. Love of sinners is his great motivation.

When sin took place in Eden, it was like dropping a precious porcelain jug on the floor and smashing it to pieces. It could not be put back together without leaking water everywhere. Sin appeared to be unfixable.

But before you were born, God worked out a way to bring you home and declare you righteous. You may find this hard to believe, but you had nothing to do with it. It was all of Jesus. All you can do is accept his gift.

The only reason you and I could be saved is because God made a switch in our fortunes. When it comes to saving, he **doesn't look at us, or at our works, he looks at the life and death of Jesus in our place**.

This is the only way we could be saved because 'we have all

sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. The works of sanctification will come as a result of gratitude. They show we have been saved, but they have no merit in our standing before God.

We love Him because He first loved us.

NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16,17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by **faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’** (NIV).

THESE ARE THE famous verses that helped Martin Luther understand how salvation works over 600 years ago. As Luther read Paul’s words, the Holy Spirit enlightened his mind, and this understanding changed his life and ours forever. Long before his great discovery Martin was set to be a lawyer, but preferred to study theology.

One day, returning to university on his horse, there was a severe thunderstorm, and a bolt of lightning struck just near him. This filled him with fear because he was terrified of dying and facing God in the Judgment. He left law school and entered an Augustinian monastery.

In spiritual despair he devoted himself to fasting, spending many hours in prayer and making long confessions. His confessor, Johann von Staupitz, who must have been a deeply spiritual man, tried to take Luther’s mind off his sins and pointed him to the goodness of Christ. The problem was that **Martin was trying to keep God’s law perfectly, and he was continually failing to achieve this. Only Christ could save him.**

Because of his failure, Martin hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. When he read the book of Romans, he kept coming across the phrase **‘the righteousness of God’, and it**

filled him with terror and struck his conscience like lightning. For centuries the Church had taught that ‘the righteousness of God’ was God’s active and personal righteousness used to punish sinners.

When Luther came to understand the phrase, ‘The righteous will live by faith’, he began to comprehend that righteousness was a gift from God given to those who had faith in the finished work of Christ on the Cross. The phrase ‘righteousness by faith’ is a synonym for ‘justification’, and it means a declaring righteous, not a making righteous.

This does not mean that righteous deeds, what we call sanctification, are unimportant. It means they are not part of our standing before God in the Judgment. When we accept Christ’s doing and dying in our place, God places this righteousness to our account. He does not see the vileness of the sinner. He only sees the likeness of his dear son.

This understanding was to change history. Luther challenged the Pope, the established church and kings like Henry VIII in England. The gospel challenged all those ideas that the church of the day used to control its flock. The light that came from Luther spread across the Western world bringing freedom while spawning riots and revivals.

When Staupitz was made the dean of the University of Wittenberg, he called Luther to teach theology. Over four years Luther obtained two bachelor degrees in theology and a doctorate of theology. After that he spent the rest of his career as a Doctor of Bible at the university.

In 1516, Johann Tetzel, a commissioner to the Pope in Italy, was sent to Germany to sell indulgences in order to raise money to build a new basilica for St. Peter’s in Rome. The idea was that people could buy righteousness to keep them out of hell. Tetzel was reported to say, ‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the

soul from purgatory springs'. Martin is quoted as saying, 'I will put a hole in Tetzels drum', the one used to assemble the people to buy these indulgences.

The following year Luther wrote to his bishop protesting the sale of indulgences. He also posted the pages on the door of the church at Wittenberg. His letter came to be called 'the ninety-five theses', showing why the practice of indulgences was wrong. Luther did not plan to disrupt the Church at Rome, but that is what happened.

For those who are sure that they are fulfilling God's demands quite nicely thank you, and for those who like to control the people or make money from them, the gospel is decidedly bad news. Wherever it is preached it brings opposition. But for those of us who have come to the end of our own righteousness and found it wanting, the gospel is the best news ever.

PASSED FROM DEATH TO LIFE

John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

ARE YOU AFRAID of dying and fearful of going through God's Final Judgment? This text is good news to you. Though the Bible teaches there is a Final Judgment, it is not what we expect. It will reveal our works of faith, the evidence that we have accepted Christ's finished work for us. But these do not 'get us through the Judgment', Jesus does.

Read the text again. If you hear God's word and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you have eternal life now. John says you do not come into judgment. You have already passed from death to life. This seems such impossibly good news, but it is what the Bible teaches. This knowledge has fortified many gospel believers for a martyr's death. John Frith in England was one of them. He was born in 1503 and died like Jesus when he was about 30. He was a brilliant scholar in mathematics and theology. At Oxford University he topped the list of his peers. He was known for his beautiful character.

The printing press was invented in about 1439 in Gutenberg in Germany. And so Martin Luther was born at the right time in 1483, as his writings could be easily printed and dispatched across Europe. King Henry VIII was born in 1493, and Luther's writings trickled across to England in the 1520s. Henry VIII hated Luther because he wrote the King a letter stating that he was a fool.

King Henry and his bishops banned all copies of Luther's

books. In Cambridge a large bonfire was made to consume a large pile of them. Nevertheless, Cambridge University fast became a hotbed of Lutheran ideas. A group of reformers met at the White Horse Tavern in Cambridge in the 1520s, and the **group came to be called 'Little Germany'**.

The members included famous names like Thomas **Cranmer, who became Henry VIII's Archbishop of Canterbury**, William Tyndale, responsible for a famous English Bible translation, Stephen Gardiner, who remained a Roman Catholic and was later Archbishop of Canterbury for Bloody Queen Mary. Several members were later martyred for their gospel faith, including Thomas Bilney, Robert Barnes and Hugh Latimer, as well as Thomas Cranmer.

John Frith was a junior canon at Thomas Wolsey's Cardinal College after 1525. Along with nine others, he was accused of possessing heretical books and imprisoned in a cellar where fish was stored. The air was so fetid and poor that a number of the group died.

When Frith was released he fled to Europe to join William Tyndale living in Antwerp. There, Frith helped Tyndale with his Bible translation and also wrote position papers attacking the Catholic Church. In 1528 Frith went to Marburg and translated a number of important works, including *Patrick's Places*, a paper on righteousness by faith. He wrote works that **directly challenged high officials in Henry VIII's church**. Because of this he was a marked man in England.

Henry VIII had split from Rome and became the head of the Church of England because he wanted to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn. These were the first of six wives, some of whom met a sorry end. But though Henry left the Church of Rome, he remained a Catholic until his death in 1543.

He is estimated to have put to death between 27,000 and 50,000 souls over his lifetime. These included reformers who were preaching and publishing **Luther's ideas**. **At the same time** Henry martyred many Catholic priests who objected to the separation from Rome, still saw the Pope as their spiritual **father, and also decried Henry's selling of the monasteries** to fund his state treasury. Sometimes Henry had Reformers and Catholics killed side-by-side—burning at the stake for the Reformers, and protesting monks and abbots were hung, drawn and quartered.

Eventually, John Frith was caught on a trip to London. He was imprisoned and then put to death for his writings against the Catholic doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation. He was burned at the stake in 1533 in London. Despite the horror of this story there is a tender spot in it. Andrew Hewet, who **'believed what John Frith believed'**, was **burned at the stake** lashed together with him. The wind blew the flames towards Hewet, hastening his death, while Frith, glad for his friend, patiently endured his own prolonged suffering.

The writings of this beautiful Christian, John Frith, influenced **Thomas Cranmer, Henry VIII's Archbishop of Canterbury**, whose own writings (*The 39 Articles* and the *Book of Common Prayer*) were to define the written English language and create the foundation documents of the English Reformation in England in the late 1540s. Once Frith had written out his views, he refused to change his mind and was ready to die for Christ. The life of this beautiful young man brings me to tears. What motivated him was learning the gospel of righteousness by faith from Martin Luther. John Frith understood that Jesus was the Resurrection and the Life. He knew that though he died, he would yet live again.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:25: Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'

MARTHA HAS LOST her beloved brother Lazarus, and she states her faith, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day' (v. 24). Jesus affirms her faith. He tells her he is the resurrection and the life, and because of that none need fear. Whoever believes in him will live, even if they die. He asks her, 'Do you believe this?'

The resurrection from death to life is hard to fathom. Many people see death as a black hole. They cannot see beyond the grave. It takes faith to believe Christ's words, but really it should not. Was it not a miracle that we were born? Is not life itself a miracle? These things have already taken place. They are evidence that life beyond the grave is feasible, even though nobody has come back to tell us about it (except Jesus).

But the real guarantee is that Jesus died and was resurrected. Therefore, so will his saints be raised at the Last Day. The Apostle Paul calls Jesus 'the firstfruits' of those who have fallen asleep—a description here of death (1 Cor. 15:20). And he states that when Jesus comes again, those who belong to him will also be raised. Paul explains 'As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive' (v. 23). Here we see the panorama of history again, with its key points. We all 'died' when our representative, Adam the first, sinned. We were all made alive in Christ, who is Adam the second, at Calvary.

Jesus went over the ground where Adam failed. He lived a perfect life (active righteousness), which would be substituted

for the sinner's wretched life. He died an atoning death (passive righteousness), which would pay for man's sins.

All of us have lost people we love. Some of us have lost many. I lost my mother some years ago; she lived until she was 96. She used to tell me she was past her due date. Sometimes life prepares us for the loss of our loved ones. God gives us time to prepare. We see them deteriorate and suffer, and when they die there is a sense of relief that they are out of pain and out of temptation. When I think of my mother it is with joy, because I know I shall see her again when Christ comes.

But other loved ones are snatched away violently, and the loss is brutal and comes as an overwhelming shock. King David handed over seven sons related to King Saul to the Gibeonites **in order that they could avenge Saul's murder** and attempted extermination of their people. Men at war take no count of the feelings of the mothers.

David gave the sons over, and the Gibeonites hanged all seven in the mountains, leaving the bodies in the open air for the birds to consume. But Rizpah, the mother of two of these sons, took sackcloth and spread it over the rock, and stayed there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain came. She would not allow the birds to feast on them in the day, or the wild animals to consume them at night.

King David heard the story, and he went and took back the bones of Saul and Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them. Then he collected the bodies of the seven young men who had been hung, and they were buried in their own land.

Here is a story of sudden, violent death to a group who are **bearing the sins of their father's warring, not their own**. The men involved see it as justice, but oh, how it stabs the mother's heart. As she protected these children in life, Rizpah watched

over them day after day in death. Her grief is unbounded and she cannot be comforted.

For those who have lost loves ones in such circumstances, the Bible offers the only consolation that can bring peace to the heart. **‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid’** (John 14:7, ESV).

THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING

Luke 12:51: Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division.

HERE WE FIND out something about the peace that Christ gives. It is a peace the world does not grasp, a peace that passes understanding. This peace is in your mind and heart.

Jesus does not promise us continual peace in this life. He tells us families and societies will be divided—‘**father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law**’ (v. 53).

The Tudor kings and queens of England are a good example of family differences over religion. When King Henry VIII separated from the Pope in Rome, he did not do it for spiritual reasons. He wanted to rid himself of his lawful wife in order to marry another woman for whom he lusted. He remained outwardly religious as the new Head of the Church of England, but in belief he was still a Catholic.

Henry closed the monasteries and put the priests out on the street—these had been the main source of charity for the poor for centuries. Those monks who objected to the switch from serving the Pope in Rome were often put to death.

Neither did Henry appreciate the Reformers, those who read the writings of Martin Luther and preached the good news of salvation in Christ alone. He made martyrs of them too. He filled the streets of England with blood and fire.

Near the end of his reign, Henry wrote what came to be called *The King’s Book*. The view of salvation in it is Catholic.

The saints were not declared righteous, but made righteous through receiving the Mass and making confession and receiving penance. This is an example of what the Bible calls ‘another gospel’ (Gal. 1:8).

Thomas Cranmer edited *The King’s Book*, and his edition is ‘purely Protestant’, although that word Protestant was not used until Queen Mary’s reign. Thomas Cranmer remained in Henry’s favour, because he had found a text in the Old Testament that a man should not marry his brother’s wife, which gave Henry a loophole to divorce Catherine of Aragon. She had been his brother Arthur’s wife until he died.

Nevertheless, Cranmer was a closet Reformer, and God protected him so that he could write the ‘founding documents’ of the English Reformation—including *The 39 Articles* and *The Book of Common Prayer*. The English-speaking world generally has no idea of the great debt it owes to Thomas Cranmer.

The royal family of the Tudors, Henry VIII and his three children—succeeding monarchs, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I—disagreed with each other over religion. They each had their turn in controlling the nation’s beliefs. Henry separated the Church of England from Rome, but his religion remained Catholic.

Edward was a Reformer. Inexplicably, Henry put his young son into the charge of men who believed in righteousness by faith. Edward was only to live to age 15, but he was very pious, and with his advisers created a base for Protestantism.

Queen Mary I came to the throne, and many of the intelligentsia of England fled to Holland and Switzerland while she reigned. Mary was a Roman Catholic and wanted vengeance for her father’s divorce of her mother. She wanted to return England to Roman Catholicism under the Pope, though the law of England forbade it.

Mary had Thomas Cranmer burnt at the stake. He recanted (denied his Protestant religion) at his trial, but Mary still had him put to death. Then Cranmer regretted his weakness and took back his recantation. He placed his hand into the fire first because it had signed the document. Mary had about 300 Protestants (mainly commoners) put to death over her lifetime. She is called Bloody Mary because of it, but in fact she killed many times fewer than her father.

When Mary died, Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne. She loved the music and ceremony of the church, but was wary of the extremes of religious affiliation. She brought back Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, but would not accept the Protestant advances of European reformers like Jean Calvin. She gave English Catholics and Calvinists each a hard time, **insisting on 'the middle way'**.

Nevertheless, because of Thomas Cranmer, the true gospel was written down in *The Common Book of Prayer*, and so the **people could hear the Reformers' good news of salvation read out in church.**

Here in the British royal family of the time (during the sixteenth century), we see our verse illustrated. The gospel brings a sword; it brings division. Families are divided. It should **not surprise us. That Thomas Cranmer's writings should survive under such circumstances is a miracle.** It shows that with all the infighting, God has his way in Providence.

DIVIDED AGAINST EACH OTHER

Luke 12:52: From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.

CONTEMPORARY WITH THE Tudor kings and queens and parallel in their generations lived a family who illustrates well the way the gospel divides families. Stephen Vaughan was a Merchant Adventurer, also working for Thomas Cromwell as a servant and diplomat from about 1520. He was based in London, but sailed to Europe. In 1530 he was made a royal agent or king's factor in the Netherlands, mainly negotiating loans with the Fugger family (German bankers).

Vaughan was accused of being sympathetic to Reformers, but was never punished for it. In 1531 Henry VIII asked him to go to Antwerp and find William Tyndale, the Bible translator. The King wanted Tyndale to retract his heretical views and return to England. Vaughan met Tyndale, but could not persuade him to go back to England. In 1534 Vaughan was made head of the **Merchant Adventurers' Company**, and the same year he became the president of the factory of English merchants at Antwerp. Vaughan tried to save Tyndale who was captured and executed in Antwerp.

Vaughan's first wife Margery Gwynneth was a silkwoman to at least two of King Henry's wives, including Anne Boleyn. Margery was the mother of Vaughan's three children: Anne, Jane and Stephen. She died when they were quite young. After that they briefly had a tutor who was a Reformer.

Vaughan remarried in 1546 to Margery Brinklow, widow of a

writer of Reformation ideas. She had a strong influence on **Stephen's elder daughter Anne**, who married Henry Locke, son of a merchant and also a Reformer. When Queen Mary came to **the throne, Anne's husband sent her to Geneva to spare her** from death. Anne Vaughan Locke is well known among scholars of English literature because she helped translate sermons for Jean Calvin, the Swiss reformer. She is also believed to have written the earliest sonnet by a woman, and so her life and work has received much attention.

After Mary's death, Anne came back to England and became a church mother to the Calvinist saints in London and was very influential. She married twice more. Her second husband was Edward Dering, a famous preacher who offended Queen Elizabeth and was refused permission to preach. As we mentioned before, Elizabeth was not interested in the advances of Calvinism, and Reformers were subject to discipline, as were Catholics.

We do not know much about the son of Stephen Vaughan of the same name except the transference of his property, but we know a lot about the other sister Jane. When Stephen Vaughan died in 1549, his brother-in-law, John Gwynneth, was made executor of his will and ward of his two daughters. As a Roman Catholic priest, Gwynneth was famous in his own right. He had received a doctorate in music from Oxford University and is remembered as a famous Tudor musician.

John Gwynneth was connected with the Monastery at **St Alban's, and protested its closing during the Dissolution of the Monasteries**. He also supported the Papacy and did not agree **with Henry VIII's separation from Rome**. But he wrote several papers against John Frith, the young Reformer who spread **Martin Luther's ideas in England**. Normally the King would have executed John Gwynneth for objecting to the separation

from Rome, but he was very pleased with his writings against John Frith. He rewarded John Gwynneth with a position of court as a royal chaplain. Exactly when we are not sure, but possibly in the time of King Edward VI, John Gwynneth was put in prison for his faith. When he came out of prison his niece and ward, Jane Vaughan, was a beautiful young woman. She was probably living with her stepmother, but not enjoying life. She had been pursued by many men for marriage, but wanted rather to be a nun. John Gwynneth had met Thomas Wiseman, a Catholic lawyer, and took his niece to meet him, suggesting she marry him, which she did.

Jane Vaughan Wiseman was as devout a Catholic as her sister, Anne Vaughan Locke, was a Protestant. Jane determined **to carry on her uncle's work for Rome. She and Thomas Wiseman** had eight amazing children who lived for Christ as Catholics. Four daughters were nuns, two in high positions in Europe. Two sons became Jesuit priests, one fought and died for the Catholics in Belgium. One son held the property, but like his mother became an active recusant (a Catholic who refused to follow the state religion).

Jane Wiseman housed Jesuit priests and ministered to them when it was illegal. She committed treason and was imprisoned for her faith and sentenced to a gruesome death. Queen Elizabeth commuted her sentence to imprisonment (maybe **because Jane's mother had worked for Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn**). Interestingly one of the people who betrayed Jane was her nephew, Henry Locke (son of Anne Vaughan).

So here is one family divided over the gospel. In this case here are two sisters, both of whom command our utmost respect for their devotion and spirituality. We leave God to do the judging, but expect both will be reunited in heaven. God not only looks at what we believe, he searches the heart.

NONE IS RIGHTEOUS

Romans 3:10: **As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no not one’.**

THIS IS A difficult statement to take in, but the Apostle Paul has spent two chapters detailing this truth. First he heralded the gospel in chapter 1:16–7. **‘The righteous shall live by faith’.** By this he elevates our spirits up to heaven. But then he brings us **down to earth and tells us the bad news.** **‘The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men’ (v. 18).** **The will of God has been revealed from the beginning, and men and women are without excuse for their sin.**

They knew God, but they did not honour him or thank him. Their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Here I quote and paraphrase the words of Romans 1:21–24:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Because of this God gave them up to lust and impurity and the dishonouring of their bodies.

Sin and unbelief never elevate. Paul lists the results—unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossiping, slander, hatred of God, insolence, haughtiness, boastfulness, evil inventiveness, and disobedience to parents. Such people are foolish, faithless, heartless and ruthless. They know that God states that such deserve to die and yet they not only do these things, but ap-

prove of others who practice them (vv. 26–32).

You may say, well I have not been guilty of these things. This is speaking about a wilful sinner, but it does not mean me. But Paul is building up a case and he will show that not only those who do not know God, or who have known God and left him, but everybody in the world—including converted Christians—fall short of the glory of God. Our righteous acts are not good enough to save us.

This means that we have no excuse to judge, because when we pass judgment on others we condemn ourselves; we have all **failed to live up to God’s righteousness (Rom. 2:2)**. Here God is speaking of the whole world, including those who have never heard of Christ. For God shows no partiality.

Those who have sinned without knowing God’s law will perish without the law, and those who have sinned under God’s law—here, the Jews—will be judged by the law (vv. 2:12–13).

But Paul does not want Jews to think they are exempted from this judgment. They may think they are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, and instructor of the foolish because they have the Law, the **knowledge and ‘the truth’**.

The Jews had the great advantage of being entrusted with **God’s teachings and wisdom (Rom. 3:2)**. However, **they are no better off** when it comes to judgment, because both Jews and Greeks are under sin (Rom. 3:9b).

And now Paul centres in on our problem and gives us a series of quotes to emphasise our position:

NONE is righteous, NO NOT ONE.

No one seeks for God.

All have turned aside ...

Not one does good NOT EVEN ONE.

And here is God’s summary about mankind and womankind:

Their throat is an open grave.
They use their tongues to deceive.
The venom of asps is under their lips.
Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.
Their feet are swift to shed blood.
In their paths are ruin and misery.
The way of peace they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Surely this is not us, we say. But Paul answers, ‘Yes, you are included’. The whole of humanity is a sorry lot.

‘We know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:19–20).

This, my brother and sister, is our sad condition and our position before the Law. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But do not despair—the good news is coming.

RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM LAW

Romans 3:23: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through **faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**’.

PAUL, THE GREAT gospel teacher, has prepared the ground for our understanding by taking us through his arguments about the sad state of humanity. First he deals with the wicked, **those who know not God. Then he talks about the Jews, God’s special people entrusted with God’s Word. Both groups are lost.** He then concludes that we are all under the law, and because of **this ‘every mouth is stopped and the whole world is accountable to God’ (Rom. 3:19b).**

Stopping the mouth uses imagery from the Jewish law courts. To place a hand over the mouth signified that one had no more to **say in one’s defence. And if a person was clearly guilty and kept on talking, the court might order their mouth to be stopped.** Paul is saying that the whole world is accountable to God because all have failed to live up to his laws. We have nothing to say.

He continues that no human being will ever be justified in **God’s sight by works of the law.** These only show us what sin is and how sinful we are. We Christians know that the closer we come to Christ the more we sense our defilement. This sense of sin is not new to us.

Daniel the great prophet, who spoke to kings and received visions about the future of the world, had a revelation of Jesus Christ before he came to this earth (Dan. 10:5). He described a

man ‘dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold. ... His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude’. Daniel alone saw the vision, but those with him felt the terror and ran and hid themselves.

Daniel was left by himself, staring at this great vision. He lost his strength, turned deathly pale and was helpless. When he heard this great being speak, Daniel fell on his face in a deep sleep. He continued to be weak, overawed by the presence of **the man, and was unable to speak. So the man touched Daniel’s lips, and Daniel tells of his anguish because of the vision. But the one who touched him on the mouth called him highly esteemed and said, ‘Peace, be strong now’ (Dan. 10:18).**

There was more to come for Daniel, but his experience thus far tells us what it is like for humans, even the best of them, to **come into God’s presence. If Daniel were unable to speak, how much more would you and I have nothing to say on our own behalf?** The story gives us a clue to our verse in Romans. When we stop depending on our own goodness and works, and trust in Christ instead of ourselves, Jesus calls us highly esteemed, **and says to us, ‘Peace, be strong now’.**

Our acceptance before God is not because of anything we **have done. We cannot merit God’s approval. We have limped since birth because our father Adam swept the whole world into a state of sinfulness. Our chapter continues by saying ‘For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:22b). That’s the sum of it, the whole human race has been tried and found wanting.**

And now, Paul tells us how we have been redeemed. ‘We **have been justified by his grace as a gift**’—that means we have been declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice for us, not because of any merit in our own works. ‘Through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (v. 24b). Here is another salvation word—redemption—which means bought back with a price. 'Whom God put forth as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith' (v. 25). And this is yet another salvation word 'propitiation', which has the meaning of sacrifice to avert God's wrath or anger concerning sin.

Some people do not like the phrase God's wrath, and ask does Jesus have to appease his Father's anger? But because God is holy, he cannot help but hate sin, and should he not be angry at all the evil in the world? Do not think of two people: God the Father and Jesus Christ, one demanding a sacrifice of the other. These are part of the Trinity—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are one person with three personae. Where one is, the others also are. So God himself takes his anger for sin out on himself and pays the price of our guilt.

This chapter 3 of Romans is a 'how to' course on being saved. When you understand it you can have Christ's peace. He has taken your lifelong burden and set you free. You only need to accept the gift.

PREPARING A PLACE FOR YOU

John 14:3: And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (NIV)

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT Jesus will come back again the second time and fetch us from this evil earth. Then we will be with him forever. ‘You heard me say, “I am going away and I am coming back to you”’ (v. 14:28).

Every generation hopes it will be the last one because of all the pain and suffering in this world. But we do not know exactly when the Lord will come, and Jesus told us clearly, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority’ (Acts 1:7).

Some Christians say, well we do not know exactly when he is coming, but we have a rough idea. Many through the ages have used the Book of Daniel with its various mystical numbers to work out when Jesus will come back. They set dates, they are sure he is coming back when they say he is. But so far they have always been disappointed, and such predictions will always fail. **Always remember, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons’. Jesus was God’s Last Word.**

Datesetting is not recent, and one example from five hundred years ago came from the great German scholar and teacher, Johann Friedrich Alsted (1588–1638). He was a German Calvinist scholar who was fired up by the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Christians often seek comfort in wartime by setting a date for Jesus to come in their time. Naturally, they want all their troubles to be over.

Alsted was the first of the Calvinists to use the Bible alone rather than astrology and astronomy to set a date. His methods were less primitive, but his calculations were still not good enough. His predictions created much speculation about the Second Coming in the seventeenth century. In 1627 Alsted detailed a very specific prophecy that the millennium (the thousand years in the Book of Revelation) would begin in 1694. Alsted died in 1638, but his books were translated and printed later in England. A very devout Anglican minister in Buckinghamshire, the Reverend John Mason, read that Jesus was coming back in 1694.

Life had been impossibly difficult for him for a long time. He had migraines and possibly epileptic seizures and also developed a large growth in his mouth that was extremely painful. Sometimes he could not leave the house because the tiniest noise caused exquisite pain.

John Mason had always been of a nervous disposition and easily excitable, and while his wife Mary was a good balance for him, she had recently died. Since then, he had been battling to cope without her.

Despite these infirmities, John Mason was a truly great Christian. He was known for his humility and devotion and was famous at the time for his hymn writing. The famous hymn writer, Isaac Watts, drew from Mason's works, and the esteemed non-conformist, Richard Baxter, gave testimony that '**John Mason was the glory of the Church of England**'.

In 1694 John Mason was dying and suffering greatly. A minister friend had given him Alsted's book, and because of his predictions, Mason had an ecstatic experience. He believed Jesus had literally come to his hometown in Water Stratford and would save the inhabitants from the terrible judgments of God supposedly coming on the earth that year.

His congregation ate, drank, and danced in the fields. Unable to see Jesus, they pleaded for God to take the scales off their eyes. One man climbed up on top of a farm roof and tried to ‘catch Jesus’, but fell down and broke a rib or two.

John Mason died in 1694, believing that the Lord had come. His followers believed that like the prophet Elijah their pastor had been taken straight to heaven. Some continued to believe it for fifty years, even though the next church minister had John Mason’s body exhumed to prove he had not been translated. When John Mason died, it was as though the Lord had come for him. He was out of pain. His next conscious moment would be when he is raised with Christ and united with his wife, Mary. In a way, the Second Coming had already happened for him.

When Christians die, they sleep awaiting Judgment Day. Here, their lives are not under investigation—this was already done at the Cross. The individual accepted salvation when he or she personally experienced faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary.

Rather, the Judgment Day reveals the new direction that a person’s life has taken. It shows his or her fitness for heaven not their sinlessness. As always, Jesus is on our side in the Final Judgment.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24, ESV).

THIS GOSPEL SHALL BE PREACHED

Matthew 24:14: And this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

WHEN I BECAME a Christian one important thing I learned was that there were two main forces in the world—good and evil—and that there was a great controversy or fight going on between the two. This idea helps explain the world down here. It gives us a reason as to why things so often go wrong. We realise that we can expect trouble because of evil forces at work. On this earth evil seems to be winning, but in fact Christ has overcome the world, the flesh and the devil (Ephesians: 2:1-3).

I joined a church that was big on law, big on judgement, big on what to do, and big on when and how the world was going to end. These are good things to think about because they concentrate the mind and help us realise what is important in life. The problem was, this group was light on the gospel.

They believed Jesus died to save us from our sins of the past. But now we must work hard to be perfect in order to get through the Judgment. They believed righteousness was housed in us once we were saved. They did not realise that our good works make no contribution to our salvation whatever.

This does not mean your life and your works do not matter. Of course they do. We are to seek to be the best we can be for Christ. But these works stem from gratitude, and they do not **add to our salvation. Jesus only saves, it's Jesus plus nothing.**

When you start off as a Christian all things are new, all things seem possible. The idea of being sinless may seem reasonable.

But if you are serious—after some time, after some failures, after falling flat on your face—you realise it will not happen in this life. Not until Jesus comes and changes us at the Resurrection will we be made fully righteous. Until then we need his declaration that we are right with God.

If you are like me, you may be fortunate to hear the gospel among all that bad advice. In my case, I married a bearer of good news. Does not Isaiah say, ‘How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”’ (Isa. 52:7). Yes, I have been blessed by marrying a man with beautiful feet.

Jesus tells us about the signs of the time of the end. After he died the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed. And in the future he sees that many will come and claim to be the Messiah. He tells us we will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but we are not to be alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is yet to come. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places, and these are only the beginning of birth pangs (Matt. 24:5-8 paraphrased).

Then the Master speaks to us of persecution and being put to death and tells us we will be hated and betrayed and deceived. **Wickedness will be such that many Christian’s love will grow cold.** But the one who stands firm until the end will be saved.

Today, as I look at the world news all the trouble Jesus predicted is happening. A passenger plane has come down in the sea near Singapore. There are devastating floods in Malaysia, 500 people are being rescued in a terrible storm near Greece while their ferry burns, Israel and the Palestinians are still fighting, the brutal ISIL terrorist forces are storming across the Arab world, and the world has remembered the tenth

anniversary of the worst natural disaster in modern times (230,000 people killed in an Asian tsunami).

These are only some of the world's problems. The bad news goes on every day—different events, different individuals and different places. It all seems to be getting more frequent and worse. Christ said it would. He said, 'Don't be alarmed'.

Among all the signs of Christ's coming, our verse gives the only necessary thing that has to happen before the Lord returns. **'This gospel will be preached in all the world'. And this makes our spreading of the gospel of primary importance.**

'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scripture' (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

WITHOUT HUMAN HANDS

Daniel 2:44: In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another person. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (NIV)

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR had a puzzling dream. He wanted to know what it meant. He didn't want to tell the dream, because anybody could invent a story to explain it. The wise men of Babylon would have to read his mind and tell him the dream first, and then interpret it. If they did not do it, they would be chopped up and their houses demolished. Nebuchadnezzar was powerful, but not a nice king.

The wise men said, 'There is nobody on earth who can do what the king asks, and no king has ever asked it of men before'. This response only made Nebuchadnezzar angrier, and he made a decree that all these men would be put to death, including Daniel and his friends.

So Daniel asked the king for time so he might reconstruct and interpret the dream for him. Then Daniel went home to pray. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. He did not forget to praise God and thank him.

Daniel went to see the king and described the dream. The king had seen an enormous, dazzling statue of amazing appearance. Its head was pure gold, its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs were of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.

Notice, the head was made of the most valuable metal, and the rest of the body was made of less and less expensive

materials. So the feet, made partly of iron and partly of clay, were partly strong and partly weak.

Then Daniel saw a rock cut out, **‘not by human hands’**, and it struck the statue on the feet and smashed them bringing down the whole. The statue was broken into pieces and became like straw on the threshing floor, and the wind swept the chaff away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth (vv. 31–35, quoted or paraphrased).

Daniel explains the vision. These differing parts of the body are empires. Nebuchadnezzar is head of the first kingdom (Babylon). Daniel calls him the king of kings and states that God has given him dominion, power, might and glory. He has put all mankind, all the beasts and birds under Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. **‘You are that head of gold’**, says Daniel.

But Nebuchadnezzar will die, and another empire will arise, inferior to his. That would be Medo-Persia, the second empire, fashioned from silver. The next one was Greece, the third empire, made of bronze, and it would rule over the whole earth. Then came the fourth empire made of iron. This was Rome, and like iron it broke and smashed everything. Then came the divided kingdoms of Europe, part iron and part clay. The people would be a mixture and would be unable to unite. This vision covered hundreds of years.

In the time of the iron and clay toes, God would set up a kingdom **‘that will never be destroyed’**. It would crush all those other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but would itself **endure forever’** (v. 44). Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God has shown him the future, and that the dream is certain and the interpretation is sure. Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel, paid him honour and gave him gifts. He acknowledged the greatness of Daniel’s God, because Daniel was able to reveal

and explain this mystery. As a result Daniel was given a high position at court, and he was made ruler over all of Babylon in charge of all its wise men.

This dream was recorded not just for Nebuchadnezzar's benefit, but also for you and me. It is a remarkable prediction of the waxing and waning of the main ancient empires, though there are different opinions about the identity of the empires. Christians see Jesus as the stone that smashed the statue—the same foundation rock that established the church on earth (1 Pet. 2:4-8; Lu. 20:18).

Some Christians believe the mighty stone is a prophecy about **the Second Coming only.** It is true that God's kingdom is only fully restored at the end of all things when Jesus returns. But it is more rightfully interpreted as beginning when Jesus came the first time, because he brought the Kingdom of God with him. The person who believes in Christ is a member of that kingdom now by faith.

Have you heard of inaugurated and consummated eschatology? These are difficult words, but eschatology is simply the study of end times or the last **days of earth's history.** Inaugurated mean 'began', and consummated means 'finished'. These words are applied respectively to the first and second comings of Christ.

The New Testament sees the two comings of Jesus as part of one whole, long period and they are thus one event. This is why **the Apostles spoke of living in the last days of earth's history.** Christ's life on earth and his atoning death are the events that established God's kingdom on earth. It began when Jesus came to earth the first time.

We enter that kingdom by faith in the living, dying and resurrected Christ and look forward to the day when Jesus comes back to claim his own and reign in righteousness.

MAKING AN END OF SIN

Daniel 9:24: Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

DANIEL NINE includes a time prophecy that foresaw the coming of Christ. The phrase in our text ‘anoint the most Holy’ refers to Jesus himself. He is the holy one, ‘the anointed one’ (a phrase that means the Messiah). Note verse 26, which tells us the Messiah will be ‘cut off’ from the land of the living. Daniel predicted Christ’s death.

Verse 24 in Hebrew actually says ‘seventy sevens’, not weeks. So what does it mean? Seventy was the approximate number of years that the Jews spent in Babylonian captivity (Jer. 29:15-23). And ‘seven’ in the Bible is a special number, used 735 times in Scripture, fifteen times more often than other numbers. It is the number of completeness, perfection, and rest—connected to God’s creation of all things.

Daniel is saying here that seventy years was the time the captives were in Babylon, and after another seven of these periods the Messiah would come. In the western world men like to be exact with these figures, but the Hebrews spoke in round numbers. This ‘490 years’ is an approximate figure. Don’t push the maths. Note what is really important in this verse. The one who is coming, the Messiah, is going to ‘finish the transgression’, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for

iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

What does transgression mean? Transgression is the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4). The words transgression and sin are related, because when we break God's law we sin. The psalmist said, 'I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"' (Psalm 32:5). In this verse sin, iniquity and transgression are all used. They are similar in meaning, but each carries a slightly different meaning.

'Sin' means to 'miss the mark' and 'fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). 'Transgression' has more to do with intention. I know what is right and wrong, but I am tempted. I sometimes knowingly do wrong. Iniquity means crookedness.

Some planned sins are called iniquities and are worse than others. Their effects are more damaging and long-lasting. But, when we understand that sin means missing the mark, it means that all humanity is levelled before the great Judge of the Universe. We are no better than anyone else.

But here in Daniel 9:24 is the greatest news ever. Jesus tells us four times in slightly different ways what his work at the Cross is about. He is making an end of evil. From the first sin in the Garden of Eden, mankind has unleashed sin and suffering on this world.

There have been wonderful things happen too—great achievements and much happiness. But sin, suffering and death wait around every corner seeking to ensnare us. We know there are good and evil forces in the world, and we long for a time when the evil will end and the good will triumph.

Daniel 9:24 tells us how this happens. The Messiah, the anointed one—Jesus—was to come. He would atone for the **breaking of God's law and thus make an end of sin.** By his righteous life (substituted in place of our own) and an atoning

death (paying for the guilt of our sin), he would reconcile the whole human race back to God. He would bring in everlasting righteousness and be the embodiment of all the prophecies.

This happened in God's plan when Jesus came to this earth. He was born in Bethlehem. He fled to Egypt with his parents. He escaped the death plot of Pharaoh. He lived his childhood in Nazareth obedient to his parents. He taught the teachers in the synagogue. He did not live in ease, but worked as a carpenter. He wandered this earth homeless doing good to all he met. He lived a life of obedience. He healed the sick, raised the dead, not using his divinity for himself. He was put on trial because he disobeyed the religion of the day and **obeyed his Father's** wishes. Innocent, he endured judgment, torture, and pain. He went as a lamb to the Cross where he suffered and died for the sins of the world. His father hid his face. His disciples fled. Yet, he died for the sins of humanity. He made an end of sin. He said, **'It is finished'**!

You and I were there, my friends. We put the thorns on his brow. We beat him with those rods. We pierced his hands with **nails**. We sneered. We said, **'If you are the King of the Jews, come down'**. Yes, we are the guilty ones. But three days later, the angel removed the tombstone, and Jesus was raised to life. He wandered Jerusalem for forty days, seen by the disciples and a cloud of witnesses. He then ascended and went to his Father. His atonement had been accepted. The only time the phrase **'everlasting righteousness'** appears in the Bible is in **Daniel 9:24**, and this shows its great importance.

Righteousness has been provided. It is a done deed.

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

John 3:7: Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'.

THE PHARISEES SOUGHT to kill Jesus because of his good works on the Sabbath Day. But one of these Pharisees, Nicodemus, who belonged to the ruling Jewish party, came to see Jesus. He was timid, he did not want his brethren to know, and so he made this visit in the night under darkness.

First, Nicodemus made an amazing confession. It appears that not all the Pharisees were against Jesus. He called Jesus 'Rabbi', meaning teacher, a mark of respect, and he said, 'We know you are a teacher who has come from God. No one,' he continued, 'could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him' (v. 2). Take note that Nicodemus was not a junior member of this ruling party, because Jesus called him 'Israel's teacher'.

John is a book about witnesses to Christ's divinity, and here we even have a Pharisee's testimony. Jesus does not directly answer Nicodemus's question, but tells him, 'No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'. This is a spiritual truth, but Nicodemus literalised it. 'How can a man be born when he is old?'

Jesus speaks much here about the role of the Spirit, 'the wind blows wherever it pleases'. In this story it is appropriate because the Holy Spirit has touched Nicodemus and brought him to see the Saviour, timid or not. Yes, that wandering Spirit has blown upon Nicodemus's heart.

Nicodemus is a wise and good man, but amazingly he does

not understand the ABC's of salvation—the building blocks of the Christian life. Read, mark and learn that not all those in elevated positions in the church know the gospel of salvation. Many are satisfied with being in the correct church and being in charge. Like Nicodemus, they are good men that do not understand the gospel. But also understand that the Spirit of God is still moving on their hearts. They need our prayers.

The answer Jesus gives is mystical. Nobody can enter his kingdom unless they are born of water and the Spirit. These are the primeval elements from which God began to make the earth—his Spirit moved on the waters—his first creation. Here **we understand that Jesus' description of the new birth, also a new creation, has two elements: purification and transformation.** These parallel ideas are represented by the symbols of water and the spirit.

Then, in the middle of his talk, Jesus gives the gospel in a nutshell. **'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up'** (v. 14).

This refers to a story told in Numbers 21:4-9. The children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness and railing against Moses. **'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food'** (v. 5). **This 'miserable food' was the manna** that God provided from heaven for their daily journey. The manna itself was to become a symbol of Christ, the Bread of Life, whom many would despise.

As a result of their bickering, the Bible says that the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. Many were bitten and died. The people came to Moses and admitted their error and asked him to pray for the Lord to take away the snakes.

Then the Lord told Moses to make a metal snake and place it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten could then look at it and live.

Moses obeyed and made the bronze snake, raising it on a pole. Those bitten who looked at it survived.

Nicodemus knew the story well. But here Jesus (called the Son of Man in the book of Daniel) identifies himself with the snake. **‘Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up’ (John 3:14).**

If you were writing the story, you might remove the snake and make Jesus a lamb upon this cross, but Jesus is explaining the gospel to Nicodemus, and the little lamb will not do here. A lamb represents the innocent Jesus very well, but here the Saviour is taking the place of the devil, that old serpent.

But more than that, Jesus is taking the place of us sinners. We also are snakes—cunning, biting, and deadly because of our sinful natures. Jesus takes our burden of guilt as if he deserves it. Because of this death loses its sting, and we can have eternal life **by accepting Christ’s gift.**

‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him’ (2 Cor. 5:2).

GIVE ME A DRINK

John 4:10: Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water'.

JESUS MEETS US each differently. In this story he is sitting tired and thirsty by a well and waiting for someone to come by and draw up the water. Here we see his divinity shadowed by his humanity. Like us, he becomes tired, thirsty and hungry. Unlike us, he is sinless.

While his disciples go into town to buy food, there comes to the well a despised woman, an adulteress who is a Samaritan and a Gentile. Normally, the Jews would have no dealings with a Samaritan, never mind a woman. But Jesus in his divinity can read this woman like a book. He knows everything about her, and he sees the hunger and thirst in her life. And so he humbles himself and asks her to give him a drink. Imagine drawing water for the One who made it!

The woman is surprised, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' Jesus holds nothing back. 'If you knew what and who I am, it would be you asking me for drink, and I would be giving you living water'.

The woman sees he has nothing to draw water with. She knows the well is deep, but she senses that here is somebody of great importance. 'Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself?'

Jesus answers her and says, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But the water I offer will become in him a spring of living water welling up to eternal life'.

The woman has a great soul need for this living water that satisfies the thirst and brings eternal life, and she asks Jesus to give it to her to spare her having to come there to draw water.

Like Nicodemus she is literalising the gift of water. But Jesus goes on to tell her all about her life. Knowing the answer, he tells her to bring her husband there, but she says she does not have one. Jesus tells her that is correct. She has had five husbands and the one she has now is not her husband.

Imagine how you would feel to have your life displayed like that when you thought your sin was hidden. She is clearly intelligent and sees that this man is different. Is he a prophet? She tries to change the topic by asking where the true temple is situated. But Jesus says the time will come when belief in God will be situated in a person not in a building. The woman **reveals her spirituality when she says, 'I know the Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ. When he comes he will tell us all things'.** Here is a woman who is a sinner by our standards, **more so by God's. And yet her heart is open and her soul is thirsty for God.** Here comes the amazing revelation; who would have expected Jesus to make the admission to her? Yet, Jesus **said to her, 'I who speak to you am he' (v. 26).** He told her plainly that he was the Messiah, the one sent from God.

When his disciples came back they were amazed that Jesus had been talking to a woman, but they did not question him, and he did not tell them what had happened. They offered him food, **but he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about'.** 'What food?' they asked each other. 'Has somebody brought him food?'

Then Jesus talked about his mission to the world, which mission he has just illustrated with this woman of Samaria.

‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me to accomplish his work. Do you not say, “There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?” Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest’ (vv. 34-35).

Because of the woman’s testimony in her town, ‘He told me all that I ever did’, many there believed in Jesus. They came and asked Jesus to stay for a couple of days, and after he spoke to them, they said, ‘we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world’.

Here in the Book of John, filled with testimonies that Jesus was divine, even a Gentile woman is included and admits it.

BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS

Luke 22:61–62: ‘The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times”. And he went outside and wept bitterly’.

THIS PETER IS the same one to whom Jesus said, ‘And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matt. 16:18). Here Jesus makes a word play, because the word Peter in Greek is *petros* (masculine) and the word stone is *petra* (feminine).

Jesus is certainly giving Peter a foundational role in his church. In Matthew 10:2, Mark 3:16 and Luke 6:14, Peter appears at the top of the list of the twelve apostles. However, Ephesians 2:20 makes it clear that Jesus Christ himself is the chief cornerstone of his church.

Here we have an emotional and talented church leader, who loved his master but at times was weak. Matthew tells the story of how Peter said to Jesus that even if everyone fell away from him, he never would. Christ told him that on that very night he would deny him three times before the rooster crows. Peter replied, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you’ (Matt. 26:35).

Peter really believed this when he said it. But when Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane pleaded with Peter, James and John to watch with him because his soul was deeply grieved, he returned from prayer to find them sleeping. ‘Could not you men keep watch with me one hour?’ This happened three times, and because they were unable to watch and pray, it opened

them to weakness and temptation.

Peter continued to do the wrong thing. When the Roman soldiers stepped forward to arrest Jesus, Peter chopped off the ear of the servant of the High Priest (v. 50–51). Jesus had to do a sewing job to put it back on. And then when Jesus was taken captive, Peter with all the other disciples deserted him and fled. Next, Peter followed Jesus to the High Court, but at a distance, sitting down with the guards to watch.

At the trial the chief priest and the Sanhedrin looked for false evidence against Jesus, and many false witnesses came forward. You might imagine that Peter stood up and waved and jumped up and down and spoke up for his Master, but you imagine wrongly. Peter listened to it all and said nothing while they declared his Saviour guilty and deserving of death.

On top of this while Peter was sitting in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said he had been with Jesus. He replied, 'I don't know what you are talking about!' He went out to the gateway where another servant girl told the people 'This man was with Jesus'. This time Peter swore and said, 'I don't know the man!'

Then a bit later some standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them? Your accent gives you away'. In response Peter called down curses and swore that he didn't know the man. Immediately the rooster crowed.

Then Peter remembered the words Jesus had said to him. 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times'. And he went outside and wept bitterly. He might have ended up committing suicide like Judas Iscariot, but as Jesus passed by on his way to execution, he gave Peter such a look of love that it saved him.

Just before the Ascension, when Jesus returned to heaven, he foresaw that Peter would fail again. He asked him three times

‘Do you love me more than these other men do?’ Peter replied, hurt, ‘Lord you know all things; you know that I love you’ (John 21:15–17). Each time, Jesus urged him to tend to his lambs. Peter was a great but fallible man, who loved his Lord and loved mankind, but at times was weak.

Much later in Galatians 2:11, Paul condemned Peter for avoiding the Gentiles from fear of the circumcision party who tried to force the Gentiles to conform to Jewish ceremonies. Peter led others including Barnabas to similarly act in a way that Paul saw as betraying the gospel. Peter had to fight his impetuosity and lack of courage all his days.

Peter was a rough and tumble man, with a big heart and wild emotions. His brother Andrew introduced him to Jesus who changed his original name from Simon to Cephas, Aramaic for **‘rock’**. Peter was aggressive and a natural leader, able to speak on behalf of others. But he often spoke and acted without thinking. He was naturally confident, but he did not know himself.

Peter is a great comfort to those of us who love Jesus deeply and have given our hearts to him, but find ourselves failing in **word and deed to represent Christ**. From Peter’s story we realise that, though there is no excuse for our sinning, there is forgiveness. We cannot make this an excuse for sin, but every day is new with Christ. There is always hope for us even when we fail—not because of us, but because Christ died for us.

DISARMING THE POWERS AND AUTHORITIES

Colossians 2:15: And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (NIV)

THIS IS A mighty verse about the end of evil. The text refers back to events that took place in the life of Samson (Judg. 16:3,32,33). What happened back then is a type of the Cross event, because Jesus disarmed the evil powers at Calvary, making a spectacle of them in public.

Samson is an interesting character. He does not fit our typical idea of a saint, yet he is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. In verse 32 the writer says he doesn't **have time** to speak of Samson (and others), but we will do so here.

Samson was a soldier of fortune, an adventurer or a mercenary. **He fought God's battles from the sidelines**, attacking the Philistines where they least expected it, becoming a great thorn in their sides.

While he was a young man he saw a woman, one of the daughters of the Philistines. He insisted that his parents get her for him as a wife (Judg. 14:4). They wanted him to marry one of his own people, but he refused. It was to cost him dearly when **his wife betrayed him, but it seems that 'it was of the Lord' that Samson made this marriage** (Judg. 14:4). It was not an ideal decision, but God would make use of it.

Samson met a lion in Timnath and it roared at him. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he tore the lion apart. When Samson passed the carcass sometime later, a swarm of bees **had made a nest in the lion's carcass. Samson took and ate**

some of the honey and gave it also to his parents, but he did not tell them where it came from. At his marriage feast Samson set a riddle for his Philistine companions. Here was the riddle, 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came something sweet'. Now you, the reader, know the answer to the riddle, but the Philistines did not.

There was a lot of wealth riding on this wager—thirty fabric sheets and thirty changes of clothing. So the Philistines came to Samson's wife and said 'Entice your husband to tell you the riddle, or else we will burn you and your father in his house'.

The wife wept for seven days, saying to Samson, 'you don't love me; you have set a riddle before my people, and you haven't told me what it is'. At first Samson resisted her—'I haven't even told my parents', but in the end her tears dragged the answer out of him, and she told her friends the answer to the riddle.

The Philistines said to him: 'What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?' Samson was so angry that he went down to Ashkelon and slew thirty Philistines, took their goods and gave the change of garments to the riddle solvers.

Because of this Samson ended up back with his parents, and his wife was given to his friend. But later Samson decided he wanted her back. Her father refused him, so he captured 300 foxes and tied them together two by two and tail to tail with firebrands between. He set them alight and sent them into the Philistines' cornfield. The fiery foxes burnt the corn, their vineyards and their olives.

Samson also slaughtered many Philistines and went and lived in seclusion on top of a rock called Etam. The men of Judah came and said they would have to bind him and deliver him to the Philistines because they were Judah's rulers. But when Samson was delivered, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him,

and he received uncommon strength and burst the cords from off his hands.

Samson found the jawbone of an ass and the Scripture states that he killed 1,000 men. Then for twenty years he was a judge in Israel. But one day in Gaza, Samson went to visit a harlot, and this became known to the heathen Gazites. They determined to lay in wait for him all night in the gate of the city **and decided, 'when it is day, we shall kill him'**.

Samson waited until midnight and then arose. With his mighty strength he pulled up the gates of the city with its two posts and took them bar and all. Putting them on his shoulders, he carried them to the top of a hill that is before Hebron (Judg. 16:3). This is the first story on which our text in Colossians is based, **but there is more to know about Samson's life.**

He married another woman, Delilah from Sorek. The Philistines promised to give her a great deal of silver if she could entice him to tell her where his great strength came from. After teasing her with false answers three times, he told her that his great strength was in his hair. Delilah had him sleep upon her **knees and called a man to cut his hair. Then Samson's strength** was gone.

The Philistines took him, gouged out his eyes, brought him to Gaza and bound him with brass fetters. He was then put on a treadmill to grind grain in the prison house. There he trod and ground grain day after day and wept in penitence.

Then about 3,000 Philistines decided to get together and have a great party to sacrifice to Dagon their god because he had delivered their enemy Samson into their hands. When they called for Samson to make sport of him he was placed between two pillars. His hair had begun to grow back, and his strength had returned.

He prayed to God to die with the Philistines and bowed with

all his might, breaking the two mighty pillars that held up the roof. Then the house fell on everybody (Judg. 16:29, 30). In death, Samson slew more than in life. This passage is also reflected in Colossians 2:15.

In his life there was a lot to be desired in Samson's behaviour. He certainly broke the rules a lot and we are not to copy him except in bravery and fighting evil. But in death, like his Master, he died for his people.

SHALL WE GO ON SINNING?

Romans 6:1,2: ‘What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin: how can we live in it any longer?’

WE LOOKED AT the life of Samson and are amazed to find him in the list of saints in Hebrews 11. He seemed to behave **how he liked and yet God accepted him**. Let’s look at the rules he broke. He disobeyed his parents, married non-believers twice, he visited a harlot, he gambled for money; he was vengeful, he murdered, he lied, he was cruel to animals, he damaged public property, and he caused havoc. He was certainly not kind to his enemies.

We have to remember that this was wartime, and the Israelites, the people of God, were in captivity to a cruel and tyrannical people, the Philistines. They were there because they **had done evil in God’s sight (Judg. 13:1)**. We have to take into account that the book of Judges was written at a time when ‘there was no king in Israel’, and ‘everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judg. 21:25)’. Samson certainly followed his own desires.

We also need to remember that Samson didn’t benefit from his sinning. In fact, he had two wives who deceived him, he wandered homeless much of the time, he ended up living lonely on a rock, he was placed in captivity, his eyes were gouged out, he was bound in bronze fetters and spent much time pounding his feet on a treadmill. Nobody gets away with sin in this life or the next, and neither did Samson.

So, how is it that Samson is listed with the saints in Hebrews

11? The answer is that he was like the penitent thief in the New Testament who lived a life of sin and was saved at the last. The thief rebuked the other felon and stated, ‘this man has done nothing wrong’. ‘And then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”’ (Luke 23:40-44). ‘Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise”’ (v. 44).

Samson had a long time to repent when he was blinded, bound and tied to an ever-turning treadmill. And when he stood close to the two pillars of the god Dagon’s temple, he prayed the penitent prayer, ‘Sovereign Lord, remember me’ (Judg. 16:28). Pushing down the pillars of the temple, he died saying, ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’ (v. 30). In this act he died for his people.

In some ways, despite his faults, Samson was a figure of Christ. His birth was miraculous because his mother had been childless. The Angel of the Lord had appeared to her as he later did to Jesus’ mother Mary. The Angel told Samson’s mother not to drink anything fermented, nor eat anything unclean.

She was never to let a razor touch the child’s head because he was to be a Nazarite, dedicated to God from the womb. He would deliver Israel from the hands of their enemies, the Philistines. When Samson pulled down the temple 3,000 people died. But when the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, and Peter preached the gospel, 3,000 lived (Acts 2:38-41).

Jesus gave his sinless life for us and died an atoning death. He gives us both—a sinless life to replace our sinful one—and an atoning death to pay for our sins. Samson could not give a sinless life, but he died for his people. In that sense he is a figure of Christ.

And so we read again that text we used before: ‘And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public

spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col. 2:15, NIV). Here Jesus' act on the Cross is expressed in language that uses the imagery of Samson conquering the Philistines (it happened twice):

Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron (Judg. 16:3) Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived (Judg. 16:29-30).

Consider the mercy, think of the condescension of our loving Heavenly Father in the way he treats us sinners. We deserve death, but he has 'raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6). Here in Colossians, Samson's deeds are used to describe Christ's mighty act on the Cross. Samson is immortalised despite his mistakes.

Lord, like Samson of old and the penitent thief on the Cross, and despite my sins, please remember me when you come into your Kingdom.

ACQUITTAL BASED ON FAITH

Romans 3:27,28: Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. (*Living Bible*)

KING HEZEKIAH WAS sick and dying, and the prophet Isaiah went to him and told him to set his house in order because he was going to die. Hezekiah did not just accept the word of the Lord. He turned his face to the wall and prayed, weeping **bitterly**, ‘**Remember now, O LORD, how I have walked before you in truth and with a loyal heart and have done what was good in your sight**’ (2 Kings 20:2-3).

Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah telling him to return and tell Hezekiah that he had heard his prayer and seen his tears and he would heal him. He would add fifteen years to his life and would deliver Jerusalem out of the hands of the Assyrians (vv. 4-7).

Hezekiah apparently had a septic boil, and Isaiah said to use a fig poultice, and this took away the blood poisoning, and Hezekiah lived. He asked for a miracle and in response to **Isaiah’s prayer the shadow on the sundial went ten degrees backwards**. God could change the sundial, and he could also **extend Hezekiah’s life** (vv. 8-11). As it turned out, Hezekiah would have been better off to accept his death, because his recovery led to pride. First, he showed all his treasures—his silver and gold, spices and precious ointments, and all of his weapons—to the emissaries of the great King of Babylon who

came to wish him well on his recovery and ask for his help.

God sent Isaiah to rebuke Hezekiah for his pride. He told him that the days would come when everything Hezekiah had accumulated would be carried to Babylon, and some of **Hezekiah's sons would be sterilised and made eunuchs in the Babylonian king's palace.**

All Hezekiah seemed concerned about was that he would have peace in his day. He did not consider his sons or his people. Hezekiah started well, but did not finish well because of selfishness.

The second result of Hezekiah's extension of life was that he subsequently sired his son Manasseh, and he was bad news. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. He followed the pagan nations God had earlier despatched (the Canaanites) and committed their abominations. He was possibly the worst of Judah's kings. **Had Hezekiah known the outcome of his son Manasseh's reign, no doubt he would not have asked for his own life to be extended.**

Some of the things Manasseh did included rebuilding the pagan high places that his father had destroyed, raising altars for Baal, and making a wooden image as wicked Ahab did before. Manasseh worshipped the sun, moon and stars; he built altars in the house of God; he made his son pass through fire (sacrificed him to Molech), practiced prophesying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritualistic mediums.

Manasseh did much to anger God, especially putting a carved image of Asherah the pagan god in the temple that David and Solomon had built, and where God had written his name. This king led his people to commit more evil than the Canaanites.

Second Kings 21:16 summarises his actions: 'Manasseh took the lives of upright men, till Jerusalem from one end to the

other was full of blood' (*Bible in Basic English*).

Here is a life that seems unredeemable, and yet when we read the parallel story in 2 Chronicles 33, we see an addition to the story. **After Manasseh's 55 year sinning binge**, the Assyrians took him captive and led him by a brass hook through the nose (v. 11). Like Samson he was bound in bronze fetters. Like so many of us, brave sinners when we are free, Manasseh saw his need of redemption when he was in trouble:

Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers and prayed to him; and [God] received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem and into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God (v. 12).

My friend, here is a story you don't hear much in church. It's a dangerous story, because human beings, being what they are, will use any excuse to sin. Here's a king who seemingly got away with repeated murder. Is it fair that he should be forgiven?

Again, Manasseh is like the penitent thief, saved in the midnight of his soul. In his time of trouble he sees the evil of his ways and repents. Unbelievably, God forgives him. Do not admire or emulate Manasseh, do not repeat his evil, but marvel at the unbelievable goodness of God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, he can lawfully take away the penalty of the worst sin of the worst man who repents.

WITH THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH

Hebrews 10:22: Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

HERE IS A verse that King David would love. He was the second and greatest King of Israel and reigned about a thousand years before Christ was born. The first King of Israel was Saul, and he represents man without regeneration (the first birth). David represents sinful man who has undergone a second birth (the new birth, regeneration).

David's great acts included his fighting as Israel's representative against Goliath the Philistine. David struck Goliath's head and killed him with a pebble from his slingshot. David was average in stature; Goliath was very tall. David had no armour; Goliath had weapons and armour galore. David was 'nobody' at that time; Goliath was a famous warrior. Nevertheless David won, and when he won, Israel won.

The New Testament tells us Jesus was descended from David, and in many ways, David is a type of Christ. We have seen that David saved his people as their representative.

When Samuel revoked Saul's kingship, he told him that 'the LORD has sought a man after his own heart' and made him prince over his people (1 Sam. 13:14). Acts 12:22 states that God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to'.

And yet David committed wilful sin in the matter of

Bathsheba and her husband Uriah.

It was spring, and at that season kings usually went to battle. David sent his general with the army and stayed in Jerusalem, and so he had too much time on his hands. One evening David arose from his bed and walked around the roof of his palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing, and she was very beautiful.

David enquired who she was, and the answer came, **‘Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite’**. Despite knowing she was married, David sent for her and slept with her, and she returned to her house. Later, she told David she was pregnant.

And so David began covering the tracks of his sin. Did he imagine that God was not watching? Did not his servants know? Who was he fooling, except himself? Still pretending that nobody could see, he called for Joab to send Uriah home from the battlefield. He expected that Uriah, having been in battle, would want to go home to be comforted by his wife. **Then the coming child would appear to be Uriah’s.**

But Uriah was a devout servant of the king. How could he please himself when his fellow warriors were embroiled in the heat of battle? **So he slept with David’s servants at the door of King David’s house and did not go down to his wife.** David was shocked. Uriah was taking the welfare of the kingdom much more seriously than the king!

David kept Uriah another night and tried another ploy. He attempted to make him drunk so he would stagger home to **Bathsheba, but this didn’t work.** So, **in the morning, David sent a letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah.** Trusting the king, Uriah carried with him his own death sentence.

Can you imagine that King David, a man after God’s own heart, would write the following about this innocent man?

‘Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die’ (2 Sam. 11:15). Here we see deliberate murder of the most treacherous kind.

Joab did what he was commanded, and he carefully crafted the message that he sent back to David. The messenger told David **all that had happened and then gave the postscript, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also’**. So David also caused Joab to become an accessory to Uriah’s murder.

Bathsheba heard of the death of her husband and mourned him. When the time of mourning was over, David sent for her **and made her his wife, and she bore him a son. ‘But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD’** (vs. 27b). God sees everything. We get away with nothing.

God sent Nathan the prophet to David. he told him a parable (2 Sam. 12:1-4) about two men in a city. One was rich, and the other one was poor. The rich man had great flocks and herds. The poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb. He bought and nourished it and raised it with his family. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom. Then a traveller came to the rich man, who refused to use his own herd to feed the visitor. **He took the poor man’s ewe instead.**

David became very angry over this man and said he deserved to die. He said this man must make restitution for this lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion. **Here David sees another man’s sin very clearly, but he does not yet see his own.** That is, he does not see it until Nathan the Prophet says, **‘You are the man!’**

David would pay for the great evil he had committed by equally great personal loss.

As he had judged himself, he would pay fourfold. **Bathsheba’s child** would die, and the sword would never leave

David's house. But note that Nathan also said to David, 'The LORD also has taken away your sin, you shall not die' (v. 13b)

Lord, our sins are so great, but your mercy is so much greater.

PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS

Isaiah 53:4-9: Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (NIV)

HOW CAN GOD forgive David and take away his sins? Surely **David's story is the most amazing story of salvation in the Bible?** You will find commentators who say, well, David was not saved. He lost his salvation because of his actions. But the Bible does not teach that.

The answer is that David is saved the way we all are. Our **verses tell us that Christ will die for David's sin. It is the divine Son who bears the punishment.** We are all sheep that have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on Christ the iniquity of us all. Some of us think we are better than others, less sinful than the rest. But Isaiah tells the truth:

All of us have become like one who is unclean
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isa. 64:6)

The sooner we accept the truth that ‘all have sinned and fall short (present continuous tense) of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23)—the better it will be for our souls. We may learn to distrust ourselves and to walk in the ways of righteousness.

There are differences in sin. We all fall short of God’s glory, but in David’s case this was wanton iniquity. When David showed remorse, God forgave even his deliberate transgression. What a God!

Never think that David got away with anything. He had to live with the knowledge that he was an adulterer and a murderer and had made Judah a joke among the heathen. He gave Nathan judgment on the man in his parable—‘he will repay fourfold’, and David did so repay. Nathan had said ‘The sword shall never depart from your house’, and that became true. David lost four sons, three of them rebels. He was also told that his wives would be taken away. His ‘companion’ would lie with them in broad daylight—that would be his own son Absalom.

Here are some of the sorrows David had to deal with. His son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. Subsequently Tamar’s brother Absalom (son to David by another wife) killed Amnon in revenge for the rape. Absalom fled to avoid punishment and David did not summon him home.

Then Joab, David’s commander, sent a wise woman to tell David a story and ask him to bring back his son, Absalom. David brought Absalom home, but would not see him until Absalom forced a meeting. By and by, Absalom tried to steal the heart of David’s people, and he ultimately declared himself king. Under the advice of Ahithophel, Absalom went to Jerusalem and slept with his father’s concubines ‘in the sight of all Israel’. He plotted to kill David and his warriors, but eventually, while riding in a thick forest, Absalom’s hair became

caught up and he was left hanging in an oak tree. Joab went and killed him as he hung in the tree.

When David was told, he wept and said, ‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son’ (2 Sam. 18: 33). But only Jesus can atone for sin—our lives are not righteous enough.

Now David had lost three sons, Bathsheba’s first son, Amnon, and Absalom. Finally, Adonijah, the oldest child by default, named himself king, even though his father still lived. Therefore, David nominated Solomon, child of Bathsheba, to be king. And Solomon had Adonijah put to death for treason. That was number four son. David would have remembered his own words ‘the man must make restitution fourfold’.

My friend, do not ask ‘what do you think of David?’ but instead ask, ‘what do you think of Christ?’ All we who know Jesus have the potential to do what David did. If you think not, you do not know yourself. Ask God to keep you from evil and keep your mind on Christ.

‘Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ...’ (Jude 1:24-25).

DELIVERED FROM DEATH

Psalm 116:8,9:

For you, LORD, have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from tumbling,
that I may walk before the LORD
in the land of the living. (NIV)

WE HAVE TALKED about David's great failures, but we must never forget his great actions. He is the only person named David in the Bible, and he and Moses are mentioned more times **than anybody else except Jesus Christ**. This shows David's great importance in the salvation story.

David is represented in the Bible as a type of Christ. He was anointed three times, and this reminds us of the Messiah (the anointed one).

Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah include this one: 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow up out of his roots' (Jer. 23:5). In the New Testament, Christ is 'the root and offspring of David' (Rev. 22:16). The Book of Acts states that Jesus 'shared the throne of David his father' (2:30).

Thus God showed his verdict and estimation of David as the father or forerunner of Christ. We look at David's iniquities, but God looked deeper.

When Samuel arrived to anoint a son of Jesse to be king over Israel, he thought at first it must be the eldest son Eliab. But God said to him:

‘Do not consider his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ (1 Sam. 16:7, NIV).

Usually the Bible does not mention the appearance of men. But of David, because he was a type of Christ, it is reported ‘He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features’ (v. 12).

David’s name meant ‘beloved’, and he was the son of ‘an ancient of days’, Jesse. He was born at Bethlehem, and like Jesus he was a shepherd. He was a direct ancestor of Christ. He defeated the evil Goliath, and in doing so represented his people. He never lost a military battle. He forgave his enemies. **David’s life was continually threatened, as was Christ’s.** For instance, King Saul threw a javelin at David more than once while he played the harp.

By contrast David came close to Saul twice and could have killed him. He showed Saul the evidence that he could have **done him harm and did not. But Saul’s jealousy only subsided** briefly each time, and for most of his reign, he tried to have David killed.

Note the path that David took when Absalom stole his throne. He crossed the Brook Kedron, he climbed Mount Olivet, he went through the Garden of Gethsemane (2 Sam. 16:30)—treading the path his Master would take on his way to the Cross.

David was betrayed by his familiar friend, Ahithophel, as Christ would be betrayed by Judas.

David wrote many songs recorded in the book of Psalms. These include Psalm 22, 23 and 24—described respectively as ‘**the Cross, the Crook and the Crown**’.

Note some of the verses, which reveal the spiritual heart of David and his profound love of God.

The Cross

Psalm 22:1 (NIV):

**‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?’**

Psalm 22:7-8 (NIV):

**‘All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
“He trusted in the LORD,” they say,
‘let the LORD rescue him.**

Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.

Psalm 22:14 (NIV):

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

Psalm 22:18 (NIV):

They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

Psalm 22:31 (NIV):

They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn;
He has done it! [or, It is finished!]

The Crook

Psalm 23 (NIV):

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

The Crown

Psalm 24:7-10 (NIV):

Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory?

The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

HOLY, SINLESS, UNDEFILED

Luke 1:35: The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God’.

HERE MARY ASKS the angel, ‘how can I conceive and bear a child when I am a virgin?’ He explains to her the birth of Jesus in as much detail as we need. She is the chosen vessel through which God will do his miraculous work of creation.

God will come to this earth in the person of his Son. The Holy Spirit will come upon her, and his power will overshadow her. And the baby to be born to her will be holy, sinless, undefiled—the Son of God.

Peter said of Christ, ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth’ (1 Pet. 2:22). He ‘knew no sin’ (2 Cor. 5:21) and ‘in him was no sin’ (1 John 3:5b).

Hebrews 7:26 tells us our High Priest, Jesus, is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens. He does not, like other priests, need to offer up sacrifices, because he is sinless. In fact, he is the sacrifice for the sins of the people (v. 27).

The Bible tells us that despite his sinlessness, Jesus understands our temptations. ‘For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin’ (Heb. 4:15).

Here in Luke 1:35 we have the language of Genesis—‘and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters’. We also have the

words John the Baptist used as he baptised Jesus, the Lamb of God. John testified, 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him'.

So the Spirit's coming down, hovering and overshadowing like a bird, is speaking of God's special work of creation. Can we really question Mary's conception of this child when we know that in the beginning God created man and woman out of the dust? Can he not create in Mary a being without sin and without a human father?

This was how it was. And this was how it must be for Christ to provide a sinless life and atoning death for all of sinful mankind, including you and me.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19-20).

The whole world was lost in the first Adam. When he and Eve sinned, he represented all of us. Mankind went into a state of rebellion, and since then all of our lives are tainted from birth. Our text is teaching us that God has reconciled the world to himself, in the person of his Son. He is begging us to return to him, and he has provided the means.

Christ was fully human and could be tempted, but like the first Adam before the Fall, he had no sinful propensities. However, coming into an imperfect world he did have sin's infirmities—he could feel weariness and hunger. The next verse tells us simply how the great exchange takes place. 'For he made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf; that in him we might be made the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21).

Here's the divine exchange. God made Jesus—the sinless one, who knew no sin—to be sin. It's the whole sin of humanity, and it's also your and my sin that is upon Christ. He took it for our sakes and on our behalf, because there was no other way. Our sin was too entrenched.

By the time we were conscious of our shortcomings, it was far too late. We had a debt we could not pay if we worked for a million eternities. What happened at the Cross was that Jesus took the burden of sin upon himself and died an atoning death. He has taken our sin, and he offers us his righteous life and atoning death in place of our own.

Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind' (John 9:39). He is telling us that not all will understand what his great gift of salvation is about. 'Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil' (John 3:19).

Pray for salve to put on your eyes, so you can see' (Rev. 3:18b).

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

THIS ONE-THOUSANDTH chapter of the Bible, John 3, tells us all we need to know in this life and in the world to come. God loves us and has provided salvation so that his children can come home. ‘God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8).

Human love is fickle. You may not have experienced much of it in **this life**. God’s love is **different**—He never changes; you can trust him. The Apostle John says, ‘We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love, abides in God, and God abides in him’ (1 Jn. 4:16, ESV).

You may feel like a failure, but Paul tells us, ‘We are more than conquerors through him who loved us’ (Rom. 8:37). He continues:

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39)

Parallel to God’s love and because of it, ‘God [is] rich in mercy’ towards us (Eph. 2:4a).

He can be rich in mercy ‘because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God]

made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.’ (Eph. 4-5)

Miles Coverdale lived from 1488 to 1569, and he wrote the first complete printed translation of the Bible into English. Coverdale was originally a Roman Catholic priest, but he became a Reformer, living into Elizabeth I’s reign. He is the one who translated the Hebrew word *‘kesed’* or *‘chesed’* as loving-kindness.

This word has no real equivalent in English and has been translated as ‘mercy’, ‘steadfast love’, ‘great kindness’, ‘favour’, and sometimes ‘loyalty’. The nearest New Testament equivalent is *‘charis’*, the Greek word that means grace. Grace means ‘unmerited and unconditional favour’.

Here is one example of the use of the word *‘kesed’*: ‘But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Psalm 86:15).

‘Kesed’ is not a word used loosely. It is covenant language and involves the idea of love and loyalty. God made a number of covenants with individuals—Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon—and the nation Israel. Though God was faithful on his part, all of his covenants before Christ were an unequal yoke with man being the weak link.

The Bible always contrasts God’s steadfast reliability with man’s changeability. ‘Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God stands forever’ (Isa. 40:8).

The Book of Jeremiah (31:31-34) predicted that God would make a New Covenant with his people, because of the continual failure of Israel to obey. Christians believe that God’s New Covenant with Christ was instituted at the Last Supper when Jesus and the Disciples celebrated the Passover Festival.

He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”. (Luke 22:19-20)

See also 1 Corinthians 11:25. The New Covenant is spelled out in Hebrews 8:6-13, and the author tells us in verse 6 that the covenant of which he is a mediator is superior to the old one, ‘**since the new covenant is established on better promises**’.

The essential form of the covenant did not change from the Old to the New Testament. What changed was the partnership in the covenant. Before, God had always been in covenant with fallible human beings. Now, he has made a covenant with his Son—Jesus, ‘**holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens**’ (Heb. 7:26).

Because Jesus always obeyed his Father in life, and because he died an atoning death on our behalf, God has accepted his atonement for our sins. Because the New Covenant has two **steadfast partners, you can depend on God’s *kesed***—his grace and steadfast love for you. We enter this new covenant by faith.

NOW IS THE JUDGMENT OF THIS WORLD

John 12:32: And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. (KJV)

JESUS HAD COME into Jerusalem sitting on a young donkey, and the people had come out with palm branches to welcome him. They cried ‘Hosanna: Blessed is the king of Israel that comes in the name of the Lord’ (v. 13).

Certain Greeks had come to the festival and wanted to see Jesus, so Andrew and Phillip, disciples, came to tell Jesus. In front of the crowd, Jesus preached a sermon, telling of his coming death. ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out’ (v. 31).

And then we have our verse, which signified that he would die of crucifixion—‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me’ (v. 32). Jesus is stating here that the Cross was God’s judgment on the world.

This text is similar to John 3:14, ‘Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up’.

We talked about this before. It was not an innocent lamb on that banner staff; it was a bronze serpent. Jesus was made sin for us, so that by imputation we might be made the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). And note that the text teaches that if we lift up the crucified Christ, he will do the drawing of men to himself. If we preach the gospel people will come.

Later, Jesus said to them, ‘I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on me should not abide in the darkness ... I came not to judge the world, but to save the world’ (vv. 46-47, ARV).

You are going to have a busy day, but I ask you, is there anything in your day that is as important as your decision about the Cross? Here is a life and death verdict that all must make and keep on making. But how easily our attention is distracted from this great matter.

‘For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’ (1 Cor. 1:18). I hope the Cross and the suffering of Christ on your behalf is very precious. I hope your fellowship with people who share your love of the gospel.

I have heard friends say that they do not believe in justification, the Cross and all that bloodshed. They call it butcher shop theology. To hear these comments is like ice water thrown on my face. It is an electrical shock to my system. It really hurts.

For such people—very reputable people—the journey of Christ to this earth to subject himself to humiliation and death for our sakes means nothing. To them it is a joke. I say for them the glory has departed. They have wandered off into darkness and lost the light of salvation.

For such people church is just a place for pleasant socialization with people of like mind—a club, a place for chat, potlucks and sharing recipes. They avoid unpleasant and divisive subjects. The horrors and realities of this evil world are curtained off by closing an eyelid.

They say, I am in the church, and we are the people. I am trying to live a good life and have a good time. There is no mourning and sorrowing to share the gospel with a lost and suffering, starving, pain-ridden, dying, lost world. They think **we should lighten up! They think we should be ‘balanced’.**

John says to such people: **‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not**

realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked' (Rev. 3:17).

Here John is stating the condition of us all without Christ—wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. The difference is that some of us realize it and have fled to Christ for forgiveness. The Cross of Christ is everything in this sad, sick world. It means more than the world to us.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

This is the Christian's motivation, this is our song, our mantra, and our Creed. We believe in the Cross and the One who was crucified for our sakes. Lord, make me anew, to follow you wherever and whatever it takes. 'Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20).

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:35: Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'. (NIV)

WE HAVE LOOKED at a number of Bible saints, and they clearly missed the mark of God's holiness as far as sinlessness, yet he accepted them. But there are two saints in particular against whom no sin is recorded. One is Daniel, of whom we spoke before. The other one is Joseph (Genesis 37: 39-50). He is a type of Christ, and thirteen chapters of the Bible are dedicated to his life.

There are numerous ways in which Joseph mirrored Jesus. I will mention just a few. He was a son of an ancient of days, and he was especially beloved of his parents. Jacob gave him a special, ornate coat 'of many colours' (in the Bible clothes are often used as a symbol of righteousness).

He loved his brothers, but they hated him and plotted to kill him. He was sent by his father to a far country to find his wicked brothers. They threw him in an empty cistern or pit (symbol of prison, burial and death), and then sold him for twenty shekels of silver to Gentiles.

Like Jesus, Joseph was tempted. He had been sold to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. Joseph prospered in his master's house, because Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him and gave him success in everything he did. And so he found favour in his eyes and became his attendant.

Potiphar entrusted everything he owned into Joseph's care.

Joseph was ‘well-built and handsome’ (Gen. 39:6b), and while Potiphar was away, his wife urged Joseph to go to bed with her. But he refused, and said he could not do such a wicked thing against God. She continued to entice him day after day, but he tried to avoid her. One day when the servants were absent, she grabbed his cloak and he left it in her hand and ran out of the house.

When Potiphar came home, his wife lied and told him that Joseph had assaulted her. She had screamed, she said, and he ran out of the house. Potiphar may or may not have believed his wife, but nevertheless he put Joseph in prison (his second time ‘in the pit’).

Life is not always easy. People can be innocent and falsely accused, and here the ‘sinless’ Joseph is again a type of Jesus. We learn here there is often no way to prove our innocence. This is something very hard to bear. Yet, when Joseph was in prison, the LORD was with him and granted him favour in the **prison warder’s eyes. Again Joseph was put in charge of everything and was successful in everything he did.**

Then we have the story of the imprisonment of the cupbearer and baker of the King of Egypt (Gen. 40). They had both offended their master, and they were imprisoned with Joseph. Enquiring about their sadness, Joseph heard the dreams of both men and told them that God interprets dreams. The first dream of the cupbearer brought good news. In three days, he would be restored to his position. Joseph asked that when the cupbearer left prison he might mention him to Pharaoh.

The baker’s dream brought bad news. Pharaoh would have him beheaded and put his body on a pole to let the birds eat him. On the third day Pharaoh had a birthday and gave a feast and brought out the two prisoners. He did to each as the dream interpreted by Joseph had foretold. But the cupbearer forgot to

mention Joseph. Christ has asked us to remember him (do this in remembrance of me), but like the cupbearer, few do. This story is similar to the two thieves, who were crucified on each side of Christ on the Cross. One was saved, and one was lost (Luke 23:32-33, 39-43).

Two years passed. God did not seem in a rush to get Joseph out of that prison, but unlike the baker God had not forgotten him. Pharaoh had a dream about seven sleek and fat cows and then seven ugly and gaunt cows that stood beside the others. The ugly, gaunt cows ate the sleek, fat ones.

Then Pharaoh had a parallel dream with seven healthy and good heads of grain eaten by seven thin and scorched heads of grain. These dreams disturbed him, and he sent for the magicians and wise men of Egypt to interpret them for him. None of them were able to do this.

Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the Pharaoh that there was a man in prison who had interpreted the dreams of him and the baker. Because of this Pharaoh sent for Joseph out of the prison and told him his dreams. Joseph said he could not interpret them, but his God could.

Then Joseph told the Pharaoh they were one and the same dream. God was telling him that there would be seven years of great abundance followed by seven years of great want. The famine would be so bad that the abundant years would be forgotten. He suggested that Pharaoh look for a wise and discerning man to put him in charge of the Land of Egypt.

Joseph advised them to collect up all the food of these good years and store the grain under the authority of Pharaoh. Then it could be used through the famine years so the country would **not be ruined**. And Pharaoh said to his officials, **'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?'**

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you’ (Gen 41:39-40). So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt, placed his signet ring on Joseph’s finger, dressed him in fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He gave him a chariot as his second-in-command. People bowed before him and shouted ‘Make way!’ Pharaoh, said ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt (Gen. 41:41-44).

Here we see an allusion to God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. ‘And God placed all things under his (Christ’s) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church’ (Eph. 1:22). Unto him every knee shall bow. (Phil. 2:10-11). Note the Book of Psalms mentions Joseph’s time in prison, where he was bound in chains with his feet in iron fetters:

Psalm 105: 17-21:

He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance:

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

Romans 8:18: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

JOSEPH, LIKE JESUS, began his special work when he was aged 30. He was able to store so much grain that ultimately he stopped keeping records. When the people of Egypt began to suffer from the famine, Pharaoh told them to go to Joseph, and **do what he tells you** (41:55). This reminds us of what the mother of Jesus said when they attended a party where the wine had run out. **‘His mother said to the servants, “What ever He says to you, do it”** (John 2:5).

But now, we begin to see God’s purposes in the imprisonment and suffering of Joseph. It has all been permitted so that God could provide for his people Israel during the great famine. Trust that God will take your sufferings and use them to honour his kingdom.

Joseph’s father, Jacob, believed his son had been dead a long time, because his brothers had taken Joseph’s coat soaked in blood to him as evidence that he was dead. When he heard there was grain in Egypt, he told ten of his sons (leaving Benjamin at home) to go down to Egypt and buy some grain so they would not die.

When they arrived in front of the governor, these sons had to bow down before the governor (Joseph). He recognised them, but they did not recognise him. Joseph had predicted this in his dream when he was seventeen years old, and they had hated him for it:

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, **they hated him all the more.** He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and **bowed down to it’.**

His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me”. Gen. 37:5-9

Even Joseph’s father objected to the idea that he would bow down to his son. But note that all along God had a divine purpose for Joseph. God knows the end from the beginning. The suffering, loneliness, and unfair imprisonment Joseph experienced would put steel in his soul for the responsibility he must ultimately bear.

The remarkable characteristic of Joseph was his faithfulness to duty—as faithful as the needle on the compass is to the North Pole. He is so rare among human beings that it is no wonder that the Bible devotes thirteen chapters to his story.

So now Joseph tested his brothers. He wanted to see his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob, and he could not leave his post. And so Joseph called his brothers spies, and put them in prison for three days, saying they would not come out unless they sent for their younger brother to see if what they told him was true.

The brothers talked among themselves. ‘We are being punished because of our brother’. Reuben said, “Didn’t I tell

you not to sin against the boy? **But you wouldn't listen**". Joseph had an interpreter and understood everything they said. Joseph wept (mentioned seven times) as Jesus would later weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44, ESV).

Joseph then decided to keep Simeon in prison and let the others go, but they must come back with their brother. He gave orders to have their sacks filled with grain and put their silver back in the mouth of each sack. When they found it that night, **the brothers were filled with fear. 'What is this that God has done to us?'** (Gen 42:27).

But the story was not over.

RAISED WITH CHRIST

Ephesians 2:6: And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ((NIV).

RETURNING HOME, THE brothers told their father all that had happened and spoke of the harshness of the lord over the land. When Jacob saw the money returned he rebuked them and said you have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me.

Reuben said to his father, you may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring Benjamin back to you, but at that point Jacob refused to let Benjamin go. However, the time came when the grain ran out, and they needed to go back and buy more wheat. Judah insisted it was no good going without Benjamin, and so Jacob gave in. But he said to take gifts to the man and **double the amount of silver. He anticipated the worst: ‘As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved’.** Often circumstances seem to be against us, but if we knew how God was ordering our lives for our best good, we would have peace.

The story goes on telling us how Joseph invited the brothers to eat with him, and they went to his house with great fear. He asked about their aged father, and when he saw his brother Benjamin, he left the room and wept. The brothers were **amazed at the feast and noted that Benjamin’s portion was five times bigger than theirs.**

Before they left, Joseph had instructed they be given their silver back and said to put his drinking cup in the sack of Benjamin. After they left Joseph sent the steward to follow them

and accuse them of stealing the cup. They denied it, but the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. All the brothers returned to Joseph's house. Judah begged that Joseph would spare his brother, for it would bring his father down to death.

Then Joseph sent his servants out and told his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' (Gen. 45:3). The brothers were so shocked they could not speak. So Joseph told them to come close, and he said, 'I am your brother Joseph who you sold into Egypt. Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. There has been famine for two years, and there will be five years more of it' (Gen. 45:4-6).

And here are the wonderful words of Joseph as he witnessed to God's work in and for him:

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance'. (Gen 45:7). So then it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, Lord of his entire household and ruler of Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me Lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute". Genesis 45:8-11

When Pharaoh heard the good news that Joseph's brother had come, he underlined all that Joseph had said, 'Bring your father and your families back to me'.

When the brothers arrived home and Jacob heard the good news, he was stunned and could not believe it. But he said

finally, ‘I am convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die’. When he did see him it was as though Joseph had been resurrected. Israel said, ‘Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive’ (Gen. 46:30).

The story of Joseph contains both tragedy and triumph. But most of all it tells us GOOD NEWS about the love and providence of our heavenly Father. There is no sin recorded against Joseph, because in many ways he is a type of Christ. Joseph was elevated to ruler of Egypt, and Pharaoh was greater only in the throne. Joseph fed Egypt and the surrounding world and saved his people.

Much later, Jesus called himself the Bread of Life—the provider of both physical and spiritual bread. At his Ascension, he returned in glory to His Father where he reigns forevermore. This is the guarantee of our acceptance with God.

Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus....

Eph. 2:5-7

SO THAT WE MAY HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE

John 6:40: ‘For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day’ (ESV)

THIS SMALL BOOK is about some of the central themes of the Cross of Christ, but it must be kept in mind that the Cross and the Resurrection are connected events. If there is no Resurrection, the Cross is of no avail.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Cor. 15:17).

The fact Jesus died on the Cross, and was raised, guarantees that one day we and our loved ones will be raised if we have faith in **Christ’s living and dying for us. The Resurrection gives us the brightest of shining hopes.** When we lose loved ones we have a hope that others without Christ do not possess.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1 Thess. 4:13)

Do not agonise over who is saved and who is not. You will find people in this book who were beloved of God, who would not be saved if it were left to our decision. Only God can read the heart—be grateful, because when it comes to salvation only

God can read your heart.

Remember the story of Peter asking about the destiny of an individual, see how Jesus answers him. It is not for us to judge.

So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!” (John 21:22).

I was very fortunate to have a loving mother. She was responsible, funny, kind, good and intelligent. I nearly died from bronchitis when I was about a year old. My mother sat up with me for three days and nights. **I believe that’s when we really bonded, though I don’t remember anything about it.** All my life I was very tied to her and remain so.

My mother was a poor thing as a child. She had a tubercular cyst and was treated for TB for five years as a little child. She also had hepatitis and encephalitis. Yet she lived until she was 96 years old, and she had worked hard all her life.

Her name was Clara Francis Ellen Davison. Despite having a number of lovely names her family called her Doris. Because of her childhood illnesses, she was tiny and doll-like. First she was Dolly, and then it became Doris. My father always called her Doris.

She was the oldest of six children. Her mother didn’t like her and often hit her. When my mum was in her nineties while I was caring for her, I came down one night to check she was all right, and she was crying, ‘Why did my mother treat me like that?’ I said to her, ‘Mum, don’t worry—all your enemies are dead. **You have outlived them all’.**

Her mother-in-law didn’t like her either. Though my mother cooked and cleaned for her all her married life **my father’s mother never had a good word to say about her.** These families

came from the East End of London, and there was nothing upper class about my roots.

My mother rose above her background and became the loving mother I remember. My brother and his children, particularly, remember her with great love. She meant everything to them.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them." (Rev. 14:13).

I lived nearly twenty five years in the USA, and I visited my mother in New Zealand as often as I could. When my husband and I retired and went back to Australia, I arranged for mum now widowed to come and live with us. Before that she had eight years in a nursing home and was deteriorating fast.

She lived with us for nearly four years until she died, and I had the privilege of taking care of her until the end. There is nothing better than caring for the ones who cared for you as a child. She was very easy to look after (not all old people are), so I understand it is not always possible.

When she was dying in my home, the ambulance people came to move her onto a hospital bed that had been brought to our home. I spoke to her, and she opened her eyes and gave me the most glorious smile. Her face somehow glistened like gold. It was very brief because she was close to dying. I did not realise it at the time, but within fifty minutes she was gone.

I loved my mother dearly, but when she died I did not weep. She so wanted to go; her life was difficult because of poor health. I believe with all my heart that I shall see her again, and we shall be together with Christ. Because of that, my first thought of her is the joy of reunion.

Of course, my mother was very old, and it was time to go. Life is complex and sometimes the very young die ahead of time, and that brings a very different type of grief. All I am saying here is that for us who believe in the Cross with all our hearts, death is less tragic, because we also believe that there is a Resurrection to come. The guarantee for this is that Christ has been raised already. He is the firstfruits. One day there will be a harvest, and we can all go home to be with our Lord.

Read this passage carefully. Without the Cross there is no Resurrection, and without the Resurrection there is no purpose for a Cross. The two events are tied.

1 Corinthians 15:12-14:

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he **“has put everything under his feet.”**

1 Thessalonians Chapter 4:13:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

TEXT LIST.

Isaiah 53:5 The Man of Sorrows
Romans 4:25 The Jewel of Justification
2 Corinthians 2:14 The Triumphal Procession
2 Corinthians 1:20 The Yes and the Amen
Ephesians 2:1 He Has Quickened Us
Zechariah 3:1 Joshua and the High Priest
2 Corinthians 5:21 Made to Be Sin for Us
Romans 1:16,17 Not Ashamed of the Gospel
John 5:24 Passed from Death to Life
John 11:25 The Resurrection and the Life
Luke 12:51 The Peace That Passes Understanding
Luke 12:52 Divided Against Each Other
Romans 3:10 None Is Righteous
Romans 3:23 Righteousness Apart from Law
John 14:3 Preparing a Place for You
Matthew 24:14 This Gospel Shall Be Preached
Daniel 2:44 Without Human Hands
Daniel 9:24 Making an End of Sin
John 3:7 You Must Be Born Again
John 4:10 Give Me a Drink
Luke 22:61–62 Before the Rooster Crows
Colossians 2:15 Disarming the Powers and Authorities
Romans 6:1,2 Shall We Go On Sinning?
Romans 3:27,28 Acquittal Based on Faith
Hebrews 10:22 With the Full Assurance of Faith
Isaiah 53:4–9 Pierced for Our Transgressions
Psalm 116:8,9 Delivered from Death
Luke 1:35 Holy, Sinless, undefiled
John 3:16 For God So Loved the World
John 12:32 Now Is the Judgment of This World
John 6:35 I am the Bread of Life
Romans 8:18 All Things Work Together for Good
Ephesians 2:6 Raised With Christ
John 6:40 So That We May Have Everlasting Life



JESUS PLUS ZERO is another way of saying JESUS ONLY. This devotional book features some of the central gospel pillars in the Bible. Too often the gospel of righteousness by faith is missing in church sermons, and yet it is the subject Christians and non-Christians most need to hear about.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they sinned against God and led the whole world into rebellion. Because of this we are all born sinners. Our transgressions vary, but in God's sight we are all level before Him.

The Apostle Paul saw salvation etched into the panorama of history. In the first Adam we were all lost. In the second Adam [Christ], the whole world was potentially saved. We each choose to accept or reject Christ's living and dying in our place as our substitute and representative.

In the Old Testament God made covenants with various individuals—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon—and also with the nation Israel. The prophet Jeremiah predicted the day would come when God would make a new covenant.

God made this 'new' covenant with the sinless, divine-human Christ. During the Lord's Supper, Christ told us that the bread represented his body, which would be given for us, and the wine represented the blood of his covenant. It is because God deals with Christ in our place that this covenant cannot fail. You can know today that you are right with God.

Through Christ's life and death God could show his steadfast love (grace and mercy) towards sinners. Christ lived a sinless life and died an atoning death (which the Reformers saw as the passive and active aspects of salvation). Both of these are placed to the account of the one who believes in Christ's finished work for him.



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