

Part 1: Jesus' Death and Resurrection

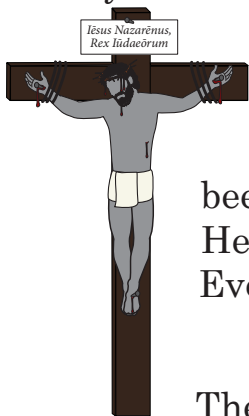
The Crucifixion

When Jesus arrived on the hill of Golgotha, the soldiers laid His body on the wooden cross and drove nails through His hands and His feet. Then they raised the cross upright for all to see. Beside Jesus were two more crosses. On these the soldiers crucified two common criminals. The physical pain from the nails was magnified by the position of the body on the cross. One could not breath well with their arms stretched out. The agony of slow suffocation was an additional cruelty of the cross.¹



A King on a Cross

They placed a sign above His head in three languages so that everyone could read it. The sign said, "This is Jesus, king of the Jews." Some stood nearby and mocked Jesus. Others shouted for Him to perform a miracle and come down from the cross. Even the two thieves who had been crucified near him mocked Jesus. (Although one would repent shortly thereafter.²) The soldiers gambled for His clothes to see who could keep them.



Only one of Jesus' disciples came to the cross. The rest were hiding and afraid. Some of the women who had followed Jesus were there. Jesus' mother was also there. How terrible it must have been for her to see her Child hanging on the cross! After He was crucified, He called out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."³ Even as He was dying, Jesus loved those who were killing Him.

When Jesus became the sacrifice for sin, God the Father turned away. There was darkness over the land for three hours. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me!"⁴ The pain of separation from the Father was greater than we may ever know. Finally, when Jesus knew that all things had been fulfilled, He said, "It is finished."⁵ Then, He died.

Jesus' death appeared to be a victory for Satan. Since the garden of Eden, he brought the destruction and deception of sin to the world. For centuries, man struggled and failed against sin. However, in this act of sacrifice, Jesus conquered Satan by offering redemption from sin.

¹ Scriptures of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection are found in Matthew 27-28, Mark 14-16, Luke 22-24, and John 19-21

³ Luke 23:34

⁴ Matthew 27:46

⁵ John 19:30

² See *Christian Basics: The Thief on the Cross*

The very first prophecy was fulfilled:

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will **crush your head**, and you will **strike his heel**.”*⁶

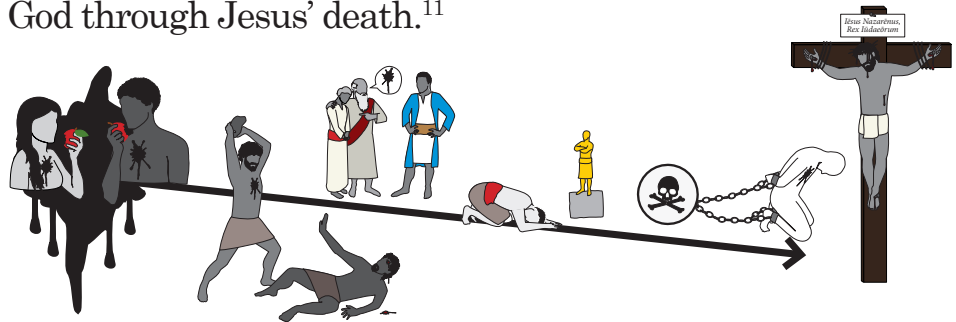


Satan had *struck the heel* with the death of Jesus. What he didn't realize was that very act *crushed the head* of Satan and the destructive grip of sin on mankind.

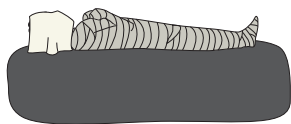
Why Jesus' Death Matters

When Jesus died, there was a great earthquake. The temple curtain was torn in two. (This symbolized that the Mosaic Age was over. The Christian Age was about to begin!) The first part of God's redemption plan had been accomplished. Jesus' death as the innocent and perfect sacrifice redeemed man from sin. Consider this:

- We all have sinned;⁷
- God is holy and can have no part of sin;⁸
- The ultimate fate for sinners is spiritual death in Hell;⁹
- God has always used the pattern of innocent sacrifice redeeming the guilt of others; Jesus was innocent and without sin;¹⁰
- We can be reconciled to God through Jesus' death.¹¹



An Empty Tomb

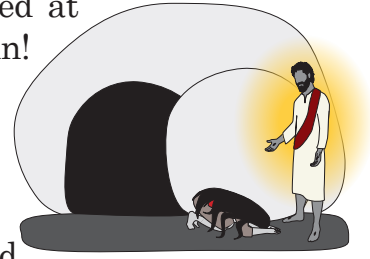


One of Jesus' followers named Joseph and some of the women present took the body down from the cross. They wrapped His body in linen and laid it inside a cave-like tomb. They rolled a large stone in front to seal the tomb. For three days, it seemed that Jesus was gone and His mission failed.

Early on Sunday morning, as the day began to dawn, some of the women took some spices to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and show respect. When they arrived, they found the stone had been rolled away! They ran back to tell the disciples. When two of them (Peter and John) heard, they ran to the tomb. The only thing they found was the burial clothes lying there with the head cloth folded up and lying by itself!

⁶ Genesis 3:15 (NIV, emphasis added) ⁹ Romans 6:23
⁷ Romans 3:23 ¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21
⁸ 1 John 1:5 ¹¹ Romans 5:10

The two men went away confused. A disciple named Mary stayed at the empty tomb crying. Suddenly, Jesus appeared. He was alive again! Prompted by Jesus, she ran to the disciples and told them what she had seen. While they were together that evening, Jesus appeared to them. He said, "Peace be with you."¹² One of the disciples (Thomas) had not been with the others, and he wouldn't believe them. After eight days, all the disciples were together (including Thomas). Jesus appeared among them again! Thomas was in shock. He could only answer with a confession of who Jesus was: "My Lord and my God!" Jesus' response to Thomas is meant as a blessing for all Christians.



*"Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."*¹³

Why Jesus' Resurrection Matters

With such amazement at the events surrounding Jesus' miraculous return from the dead, a perceptive question is: Why does the resurrection of Jesus matter?

1 *The Resurrection proves the Deity of Jesus.*¹⁴ He claimed to come from heaven, and His miraculous return from the dead proved it.

2 *The Resurrection validates the Bible's message.*¹⁵ With so many books written across so many years foretelling that a Messiah and Redeemer would come, the entire message of the Bible is validated when He returned as risen Savior!

3 *The Resurrection demonstrates God's power over death.*¹⁶ By returning from the grave, Jesus showed that God's power could overcome death and offer man the salvation of a resurrection to eternal life.



4 *The Resurrection offers man the hope to have eternal life.*¹⁷ If Jesus died as a sacrifice only to be conquered in death, there could be no true victory for Christians. It wouldn't matter that we were saved, if our only fate was to die. There would be no need for salvation; everyone would just stay dead. The Bible says:

*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. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*¹⁸

Jesus was crucified, killed, and buried. Early that Sunday morning, God raised Jesus back to life. God's plan had worked! Man can escape sin and death and return to a harmonious fellowship with God! The following is sweeter now than ever before:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

¹² John 19:23

¹³ John 20:29

¹⁴ Romans 1:4

¹⁵ Psalm 16:8-10

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

¹⁷ Romans 5:10

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (NASB) **3**

Part 2: Anyone Can Be Saved!

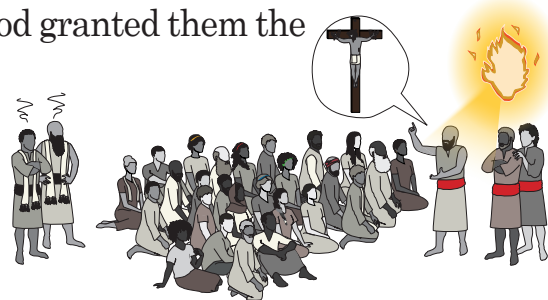
Introduction: The Great Question

*What must I do to be saved?*¹ This is the great question that people have asked since the good news about Jesus' sacrifice was first preached. Other inquiries about salvation might be: *How does a person become a Christian? How does someone begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? How does one join the church?* While the wording may vary, the concepts point to the same inquiry: *the need be saved from sin and spiritual death.*



The First Conversions

After His resurrection, Jesus stayed on the earth forty days. Then, He ascended to Heaven in clouds. Later, God sent the Holy Spirit to inspire Jesus' apostles.² The Spirit appeared like fire and wind. He gave them miraculous power to *speak in tongues*. This means they could to speak in foreign languages with no prior study or experience. God granted them the ability to overcome the curse of Babel from thousands of years ago!³ The apostles immediately began preaching.



A special festival had brought people from all nations to Jerusalem. Peter preached to a large crowd of Jews and explained who Jesus was, why He mattered, and how the people were all guilty for putting Jesus to death. Many people were convicted of their sins when they heard this gospel sermon. They asked what they should do. Peter said:

*“Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*⁴

Three thousand people obeyed Jesus' gospel and were baptized! The Christian Age had begun and the church was established.⁵ The Bible says these new Christians:

*[...] ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*⁶

The Worst Sinner

The Bible shows many Jewish religious leaders did not like this new faith. They greatly persecuted the church. While they stoned a Christian to death, a man named Saul watched in approval.⁷ He then began persecuting Christians *unto death*.⁸ While traveling to a different city to arrest some, Jesus appeared and blinded Saul! He asked why Saul was persecuting *Him*.

¹ Acts 16:30

² Acts 2:1-4; See *Christian Basics: Miraculous Gifts in the NT*

³ See Genesis 11 for the curse of Babel

⁴ Acts 2:38

⁵ For further studies on the church, please consider *Pure and Simple Bible: The Church Series*

⁶ Acts 2:46-47

⁷ Acts 6-7

⁸ Acts 22:4

Jesus implied that when a Christian is persecuted, He is too.⁹ Saul was told to wait in Damascus. After a few days, a Christian named Ananias was guided by the Lord to find Saul. He touched his eyes, and Saul could see again. Saul immediately washed his sins away in baptism.¹⁰ How could such a terrible man be offered redemption from his sins? Saul (a.k.a. *Paul*) later wrote:



Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.¹¹

The Good News About Salvation

Paul considered himself *the worst of sinners* because he had opposed God and approved in the arrest and murder of Christians. He reflected that if God could forgive *the worst of sinners*, God could forgive anyone!

The gospel of Jesus is good news for a good reason: *we can all be saved!* Salvation is not for people of a certain skin color, language, culture, wealth, or education. God wants *everyone* to be saved! God created every person in His image. Every person is special and unique to God. No matter who one is, what they have done, or how unworthy they may feel, God loves us all and wants everyone to be saved.

Salvation starts with God

The converted Paul explained that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. Salvation from sin and spiritual death must always be seen as Divine in origin. Mankind has tried to save themselves in many ways, but sin is too great and mankind is too weak. For this reason, salvation starts with God. It's important to know some specific terms when we consider salvation:

When God plans and God works	When God plans and man works	When man plans and man works
Grace	Faith	Merit
<i>an unmerited/undeserved favor</i>	<i>a demonstration of complete trust</i>	<i>a reward or wage that one deserves</i>

Salvation starts with God's grace because He did not have to send Jesus. In His love, God sent His innocent Son to die in our guilty place. This unmerited and undeserved favor is God's grace. The Bible teaches we cannot be saved by our own works.¹²⁻¹³ If one tries to *earn* salvation through their own works of merit, they imply that salvation is something they *deserve* and not God's precious gift. The Bible also says we access God's grace through faith. We have faith in God by obeying what He has commanded (also called "obeying the gospel").¹⁴ What has God planned for penitent sinners to do in faith?

⁹ Saul's encounter with Jesus and eventual conversion are found in Acts 9

¹⁰ Paul's baptism is recorded in Acts 9:10-22 and 22:15-16

¹¹ Timothy 1:15-16 (NIV)

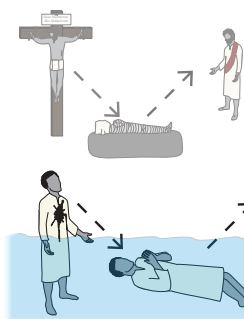
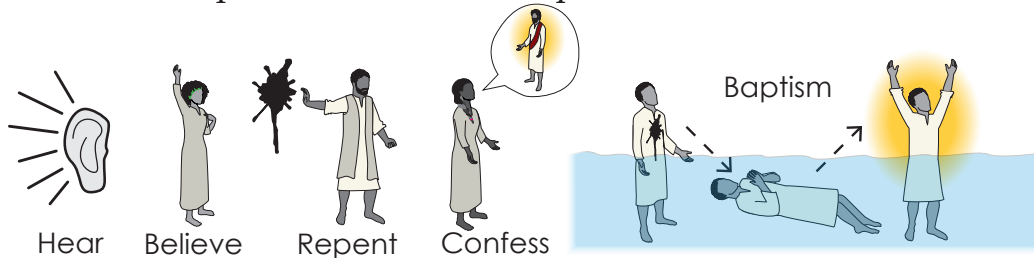
¹² Ephesians 2:8-10; See *Christian Basics: All About Works*

¹³ Ephesians 2:6,8; See *Christian Basics: How Do You Become a Christian?*

5 ¹⁴ 2 Thessalonians 1:8

What must I do to be saved?

The Bible teaches that faith comes by *hearing* the gospel.¹⁵ Faith *believes*¹⁶ that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. Faith is shown in *repentance*¹⁷ of sins. Repentance is a lifestyle change from serving sin to serving God. Faith is stated by *confessing*¹⁸ that Jesus is the Son of God. These words are confessed when one is ready to be saved, but it doesn't end there. The new lifestyle of godliness becomes a confession of Christ. Faith is demonstrated when a penitent sinner is *baptized* in water for the remission of sins.¹⁹



Baptism is symbolic of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. He submitted to a physical action (death on a cross) to accomplish a spiritual action (redemption of sin for mankind). Likewise, a penitent sinner symbolically dies to sin, is buried with Christ, and is resurrected as a new, saved person!²⁰ The penitent sinner submits to a physical action (going under water) to accomplish a spiritual action (remission of sins.)

When a penitent sinner is baptized, there is nothing magical in the water that literally washes us clean. The water is not holy. The act of faith that obeys as God instructed is what saves us. The Bible says:

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ²¹

Hearing the gospel, believing, repenting of sin, confessing Christ, and baptism must be done in faith. Without faith, hearing the gospel would only be *listening* to words; confessing Christ would only be *saying* some words; being baptized would only be getting wet. By the grace of God, we obey the gospel of Jesus in faith when we obey what God has planned. From that moment, we belong to Christ and do our best to live a Christian lifestyle. God wants all men to be saved. While some may feel guilty or unworthy, the Bible teaches that God's grace can reach anyone who is willing to faithfully obey the gospel. Please know that Jesus has *you* in mind when He said so long ago:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

¹⁵ Romans 10:17

¹⁶ Mark 16:16

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 7:10

¹⁸ Romans 10:9-10, Acts 8:36-38, Matthew 10:32-33

¹⁹ Acts 2:38; 22:16, Galatians 3:27-28

²⁰ Romans 6:3-6

²¹ 1 Peter 3:20-21 (NASB); See *Christian Basics: All About Baptism*