THE MAJORS

NINE ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIANITY



THE MAJORS

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The Majors: Nine Essentials of Christianity

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PREFACE

Everyone has a belief system, philosophy, and worldview. The real challenge is not necessarily what people believe, but why they believe what they believe. Too many “Christians” fall away from what they were taught because they never stopped to find support material. They do not know how to explain or defend their view. They actually do not know how to support their core values.

“The Majors” consists of twelve study guides to address the “major” essential aspects of Christianity. These are written for personal use or group discussion. There are also seventy-two devotions that dig deeper into the Bible so you can know why you know what you know.

“The Majors” was written for two main reasons. First, it is designed to help those who are searching to better understand the foundations of Christianity. Second, *“The Majors”* targets those who are followers of Jesus Christ who want to better understand what the Bible has to say concerning their worldview.

One of the biggest tragedies in America today is that we send our children off to college and the world without them knowing why they believe what they have professed.

1

INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



The Bible is the number one best seller of all time. There is nothing like the Bible. It has no equal. It is like no other book in history. Though the world is filled with books, the Bible stands alone. N.T. Wright said, “The Bible is the book of my life. It's the book I live with, the book I live by, the book I want to die by.”

1. What makes the Bible special, unique, and valuable?

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2. Why is the Bible the first topic covered in this series?

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Norman Geisler said, “The inerrancy of Scripture is the foundational doctrine in which all other doctrines rest, and the Psalmist rightly said, ‘If the foundation be destroyed, then what can the righteous do?’”

God has revealed Himself in three main ways. First, He has revealed Himself through nature (Romans 1:19-20). Second, He revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus (John 14:9). Third, He revealed Himself through His Word, the Bible.

3. Are there other ways in which you believe God reveals Himself?

_____

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It is vital that we understand why we can trust God's Word. It is necessary in order to comprehend all other disciplines. Inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy are all part of understanding the power, particularity, and perfection of God’s Word.

INSPIRATION

The Bible is from God (breathed out by God) through human writers. It is not just "inspired" by God, it is directly from Him. He breathed out the words.

2 Timothy 3:16 expresses this truth, ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."***

4. How should the Bible be used?

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2 Peter 1:20-21 adds insight into this discipline, ***"Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."***

5. How did the men who wrote the Bible get their words?

_____

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1 Thessalonians 2:13 continues this concept, ***"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."***

6. Since God cannot lie, what does it say about His Word?

_____

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INFALIBILITY

The Bible cannot fall or fail. The Bible is clear; God is all-knowing and all-powerful, so His Word will stand.

Matthew 5:18 points out, ***"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."***

7. According to this verse, how precise is God's Word?

_____
_____
_____

Isaiah 40:8 says, ***"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."***

8. How can these verses challenge us?

_____
_____
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9. How can these verses comfort us?

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"Even though the Bible is an ancient document, every person in every situation in every society that's ever existed can find in this book things that endure forever. Here's a book that never needs another edition. It never needs to be edited, never has to be updated, is never out of date or obsolete. It speaks to us as pointedly and directly as it ever has to anyone in any century since it was written. It's so pure that it lasts forever." John MacArthur

INERRANCY

The Bible is without errors. There are no discrepancies. It never contradicts itself. It not only contains truth, but it is also the truth.

John 17:17 says, ***"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."***

10. If the Bible has errors, does it make God (and Jesus) a liar?

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_____
_____

11. What problems arise if God (and Jesus) is a liar?

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"To forsake the inerrancy of Scripture is to snuff humanity's only candle of truth. Inerrancy is the ship's rudder, the traveler's compass, the lamp to our feet and light to our path." Ray Comfort

The Bible gives an accurate account of history, but it also tells the future. One of the strongest points expressing the uniqueness of the Bible is fulfilled prophecy. The Old Testament contains prophecy, and some of it has already been fulfilled.

Here are twelve (of some 330) fulfilled prophecies that help show the truth of God's Word. Note how much earlier the prophecy was written and describe the event.

Genesis 49:8-10 (written about 1,500 years beforehand)
Matthew 1:1-3
Revelation 5:5

_____
_____

Micah 5:2 (written about 700 years beforehand)
Matthew 2:1-6

_____

_____

Isaiah 9:7 (written about 700 years beforehand)
Matthew 1:1

_____

_____

Psalm 72:10-11 (written about 1,000 years beforehand)
Matthew 2:1-11

_____

_____

Jeremiah 31:15 (written about 600 years beforehand)
Matthew 2:16-18

_____

_____

Zechariah 9:9 (written about 500 years beforehand)
Mark 11:1-10

_____

_____

Isaiah 29:18; 35:5 (written about 700 years beforehand)
Matthew 11:5

_____

_____

Exodus 12:46
Psalm 34:20 (written about 1,500 years beforehand)
John 19:31-36

_____

_____

Micah 5:1 (written about 700 years beforehand)
Matthew 27:30

_____

_____

Psalm 22:16
Zechariah 12:10 (written about 1,000 years beforehand)
John 20:25-29

_____

_____

Psalm 22:18 (written about 1,000 years beforehand)
John 19:23-24

_____

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Zechariah 11:12-13 (written about 500 years beforehand)
Matthew 27:5-8

_____

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Franklin Graham said, “History and human nature prove the truth of the Bible every day, but the greatest evidence is seen in changed lives that cannot be denied. This infallible Book is its own great commentary: ‘The entirety of Your word, Lord, is truth’ (Psalm 119:160).”

12. How should the inerrancy of Scripture affect our lives?

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13. Why does this discipline need to be one of The Majors?

_____

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“A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” Charles H. Spurgeon

NOTES

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

Three cheers for any of you who are reading this with an actual Bible sitting next to you. I am not including any of these digital "Bibles" on phones, tablets, and computers! I am talking about one that has pages you have to turn by hand, pages so thin that your highlighter is going to mark some obscure passage on the backside of that page! The thing is a work of art, complete with ribbons, gold edges, and an embossed cross on the cover. It is a real Bible. It is a Bible that requires a commitment to carry it, both for its visibility and its weight! I am talking about a Bible that can be broken in and worn out through continual use. It is a real Bible. It is the kind that smells the way any proper Bible should, like a dead cow! Are any of my people still out there?

I am of course only joking. I sit every morning and read my Bible on my tablet. I take down notes and highlight passages just as I once did with a physical Bible. I search the Bible on my phone and compare passages while on the go from place to place. I use a computer religiously (pun intended) to study for the various sermons I preach each week. I do all that, with my real Bible sitting next to me as I write this. The truth is, the paper, ribbons, embossing, and leather (that glorious leather) do not make the Bible what it is. That is just one way of delivering its content. It is the content, the actual words on those pages, whether physical or digital, audio or visual, that is the show stopper.

There is nothing like the Bible. It has no equal. It is like no other book

in history. Though the world is filled with books, the Bible stands alone. It stands alone for one primary reason. One thing sets it apart forever. It comes from God Himself. He wrote it. Oh sure, He used people to physically put pen to paper, but God wrote it. Therefore, it is not the disjointed ramblings of 40 different authors through 66 books. It is one unified message written through thousands of years of human history by God Himself through His people. That changes everything.

This truth is undeniably clear in 2 Timothy 3:16 where it says, ***"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God"*** (NKJV). The content of the Bible is called ***"Scripture"*** because it is more than just advice, conjecture, or opinion. It is bedrock truth because it comes from God Himself. The passage goes on to say, ***"all Scripture is given."*** This means that the writers did not sit down to think about what they would like to write or address. They were "given" what was written. It was given by God. They wrote down what God gave them to write. It goes on and says, ***"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God."*** The word translated ***"inspiration"*** means "to fill, to breathe." It referred to the filling of the sails of a boat or someone simply breathing. The point is clear. God breathed out His Word, the Bible, giving it to those who loved Him and wrote it down for us.

Because the Bible is the "breathing out" of the actual source of all life, truth, and purpose, the Bible is powerful. The rest of verses 16-17 show us this as we read, ***"and is profitable for doctrine*** (teaching), ***for reproof*** (error correcting), ***for correction*** (showing the right way), ***for instruction in righteousness*** (growth!) ***that the man of God may be complete*** (grown up), ***thoroughly equipped for every good work*** (ready for everything God sends us to do)."

So grab a Bible, dig in, and have the confidence that every word you are reading comes from God Himself!

2 PETER 1:19-20

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

As I was growing up, I was often taught that the Scripture is inerrant, but "inerrant" is not a word we often use. However, I love looking up word meanings and antonyms (opposites). So, when I looked up the opposite of inerrant, Merriam-Webster cites words like unreliable, shaky, dubious, dodgy, questionable, doubtful, or uncertain. I then wanted to know what words are similar to the word inerrant. Again, according to Merriam-Webster, inerrant means infallible, reliable, trustworthy, dependable, credible, and solid. Did I mention, I really love to look up words?! The message of this topic is that the Bible (also called Scripture) is free from error. I have heard it said, “The Bible never fails!”

In 2 Peter 1:19-20, we read, ***“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.”*** Here we have it recorded from the Apostle Peter that the Bible is infallible, and that ***“no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.”*** In verse 21, it reads, ***“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** Here, we learn that the prophets and writers of the Bible were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote God’s Word.

We also know a lot from 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*** Can you imagine? How could anything that was ***“breathed out by God”*** be wrong? We know that God cannot breathe out anything in error. We read in Proverbs 30:5, ***“Every word of***

God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." We know that God's Word is true and without error.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Back in my B.C. (before Christ) days I was always put off by Christian arrogance, or at least what I perceived to be arrogance. I had a friend in high school who was a believer; I am pretty sure his name was Dan. I remember one day Dan asked me about Jesus and my views on salvation and what not. I do not remember much about the conversation. Clearly, I did not begin following Jesus at that moment, but I remember being so put off by the idea that this guy put so much faith in the Bible. I recall attacking the validity of the Bible, the flaws in the notion that God inspired men to write it, and every other naive argument I could raise. Oddly, one thing I cannot forget about this conversation was my closing remark to him. Not listening or giving him a chance, I remember looking at Dan saying, "You put so much faith in a book as your guide to life, well *"Hop on Pop"* is the book I choose to put my faith in, what is the difference?" For years I thought I was so clever. I know I used this in different arguments with other Christians, but I look at it now and realize how flawed, immature, and unintelligent I was. It is weird that God never lets this conversation be forgotten. Fast forward eight or so years after that conversation and I sit here typing this as a person who went to college and majored in Biblical Studies. As a pastor, I am a person who is figuring out how to most effectively teach Scripture. It has become an all-consuming obsession of mine. God sure is funny sometimes.

Sadly, I have seen Christians live their lives as if *"Hop on Pop"* was at the same level as the Bible. Maybe it is not exactly *"Hop on Pop"* but living as if a book is at the same level as the Bible. Clearly, we scoff at the notion of putting a Dr. Seuss classic on the same level as the Bible, but honestly, at times we let other books become more influential in our walk with God. I have fallen victim to reading Christian books by some of my favorite pastors instead of reading the Bible. I love the mindsets of

David Platt, Francis Chan, Charles Spurgeon, and Oswald Chambers but reading these books is not the same as reading the Bible. *"Crazy Love"* and *"Radical"* are not cannon. Reading those books is not bad, but I caught myself reading peoples' perspectives of the Bible more than I was reading the Bible itself. We must make sure the one book we saturate our selves in reading comes from a source that is everlasting, powerful, and true.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, ***"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."*** Paul is making a big claim, and as an unbeliever, I could not understand this. Paul is telling people to realize that the things Paul writes about are not just Paul's opinion or Paul's motives. The things Paul wrote about were the Word of God. The reality is the Bible did not just fall from Heaven; God used men to pen it. We live in such a cynical indecisive culture that we pick apart and argue about everything. Since God is real, then God's Word is true. If God's Word is the Bible, then the Bible must true.

After a few years of living for Jesus, I spun my *"Hop on Pop"* argument to help me witness to unsaved high browed individuals, like my former self. The thing that makes the Bible perfect is its author. *"Hop on Pop's"* truth can only go as far as how powerful Dr. Seuss was. Since the Bible's truth comes from its author; therefore, its truth can go on for eternity. Since the Bible's author has the power to lead someone from death to life, I think we can put a high degree of certainty that the Bible is true.

The idea that Scripture is inspired and infallible is a fundamental cornerstone of living for Jesus. This notion cannot be shifted, moved, or even up for debate. Everything in our lives hinges on if the Bible is true or not. If one part of the Bible is not true, then everything can fall apart behind it. In our lives, if we make one part of the Bible to be opinion or a guideline and not a command, everything in our lives will fall apart behind that notion.

The reason the Bible is true is not based on the men who penned it; it is based on the real God that told them what to write. Since an everlasting,

Holy, true, powerful God said something, you can pretty much take that as truth.

JOHN 17:17

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17

The night that Jesus was betrayed, He prayed for me. He prayed for you. He prayed ***"for those who will believe in me through their*** [the apostles'] ***word,"*** (John 17:20). He prayed for unity in the church. He prayed that we would see His glory. He prayed that we would love the Father and each other. He prayed that the heavenly Father would keep us from the evil one. He prayed that God would sanctify us, setting us apart for His holy purpose and service.

Jesus prays, simultaneously teaching us, that the cleansing (sanctification) process would happen through truth. In John 8:32, Jesus is confronting the religious leaders and says, ***"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** The truth is what purifies our hearts and sets us free from the flesh, releasing the powerful clutches of sin that enslaves us. But what is the truth? In Jesus' High-Priestly prayer in John chapter 17, He concretely states, ***"Your word is truth."***

Truth is a major theme in the Gospel of John. Only hours after the High Priestly prayer, Jesus tells Pilot, ***"I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth."*** (John 18:37). But what Jesus states is profoundly important. Jesus has both called Himself truth (John 14:6) and referred to God's Word as truth. What Jesus means is crucial for every believer to understand. Jesus declares the unchanging reality that God's Word, the Scripture, is Truth.

It is through the truth of the Bible that we understand God's infinitely perfect glory, the depth of our sin, and see the redemptive plan of God unfolding and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The truth not only helps us see the glorious

nature and plan of God but truly leads us to love Jesus, the Truth, more. This is so simple and yet so profound. When we read the Scripture, we discover the unchanging truth of God who is Jesus, who sets us free from sin and ***"cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** We must daily commit to being in the Truth (Scripture) so that we may know the Truth (Jesus, our Savior).

ISAIAH 40:8

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

If you live in Michigan or a place that experiences the four seasons, you probably love fall. Fall is the greatest time to be outside with all of the colors at a cider mill, play sports, or just get out for a walk. The colors are breathtaking, the air is crisp, and the scents are delightful. I love all football, cider, and donuts, but one thing I never look forward to is raking leaves. I have eight mature oak trees on my half acre lot that love to torture me. Hundreds and hundreds of bags later, my yard is clear from leaves, but man is it a ton of work. The life of a leaf is interesting. Its birth in the spring and death in the fall make for a short life. All things go through seasons; things come, and things go. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, ***"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*** A band called The Byrds wrote a song in 1965 called *"Turn, Turn, Turn"* based off of this exact chapter, and it turned out to be hit in the United States and the United Kingdom; it's still played and sung to this day!

The words of this verse say it all, ***"For everything there is a season."*** Isaiah 40:8 tells us, ***"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*** Things come and go, fads come in style and leave as quick as they came. My kids loved the fidget spinners for a couple of weeks (weird craze in my opinion), but now those things are just lost among the pile of other old toy fads that came and went. We all can think of something that has come into style and now is not, yet we own it. I still like cargo shorts! Ha Ha! However, the book of Isaiah is clear, though everything may fade away and lose relevance, the Word of the Lord will not ever lose relevance. God's Word is the same yesterday, today, and forever. When our world seems to be turned upside down by tragedies, God's Word is something we can stand on. God's Word says He will never leave you or forsake you, and that is something that you can take to the bank no matter what the circumstance. So today in the business of your life, know this: when all things come and go, His Word will never leave.

MATTHEW 5:18

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

"You get nothing! You lose! Good day sir!" This is the climax of the legendary film, *"Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."* This is where the movie gets serious. Gene Wilder, aka Willy Wonka, exploded on Charlie (the main character) by telling Charlie that he had violated the factory contract. The movie revolved around five children who are specially chosen to take a tour of the mysterious Wonka Chocolate Factory. When the children first entered the chocolate factory, they signed a seemingly unimportant contract. The font size of the letters was very large at the top of the contract, but as the words continued, the font size got smaller and smaller until it was impossible to read. All the children signed anyway. At the end of the movie, Willy Wonka revealed that Charlie did not follow all the rules of the contract. At which point, Willy Wonka had to pull out a magnifying glass to read the fine print of the contract.

In Matthew 5:18 (KJV) Jesus says, ***"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."*** A ***"jot"*** is the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and is also the smallest letter. The ***"tittle"*** is a small stroke only part of a letter, (think of the tiny dot used in a lower case i or j in the English alphabet.)

Jesus says that not even the smallest letter or stroke will pass away from God's word. In fact, Jesus places the Old Testament in the highest regard, signifying that all of the Old Testament, even the fine print, is true and completely from God. Later in Matthew, Jesus speaks of words again. But this time, He does not speak of the words of the Old Testament. ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"*** (Matthew 24:35). He says, ***"my words."*** Jesus is now speaking of His own words here on earth. With this revelation, Jesus "equates his own words with the word of God," as MacArthur explains, and therefore makes the claim that He is God.

In the 1970's, the makers of *"Star Wars"* searched for a toy company to make action figures for their movie characters. All of the big toy companies turned down the proposals (Obviously, this was before the first movie came out). Finally, they found a small toy company out of Cincinnati called Kenner that received a very favorable contract. As we all know, *"Star Wars"* soon became one of the greatest movie franchises of all time, making Kenner millions of dollars. Contractually, Kenner was required to pay the makers of *"Star Wars"* a mere $10,000 a year to maintain the contract, a small iota of their earnings. However, as years went by, someone forgot to read the fine print and did not send the $10,000 check. The contract became void and cost the toy company millions and millions of dollars to get it back.

The Word of the Lord is so important. We are blessed to have it in our homes, on our computers, and on our phones. Do not miss out on all that the Bible offers. I want to challenge you to have it in your heart. It is powerful, and every little detail Jesus says is true. Remember this the next time you decide to skip your Bible time.

2

SALVATION

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



God created man and woman. He gave them one commandment, and they broke it; they sinned. It broke the relationship between God and us. God promised to send One who would be the bridge. For thousands of years, the people of Israel offered sacrifices striving to repair their connection with God. Finally, Jesus (the Messiah and God's Son) came to earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again offering us life. This "salvation" is by His grace and is called a gift.

1. What are some of the best gifts you have given or received?

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Ephesians 2:8-9 is one of the clearest passages on this topic, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

2. What are some things people do trying to please God or get saved?

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3. According to this passage, how can one be saved?

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"Grace means undeserved kindness. It is the gift of God to man the moment he sees he is unworthy of God's favor." Dwight L. Moody

Romans 3:20-24 adds to the conversation, ***"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. 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. For there is no distinction: for all have***

sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." I remember the definition of justification as just-as-if-I-never-sinned.

4. What is the purpose of the law?

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5. According to this passage, what percentage of people have sinned?

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_____

"I'm not perfect. And who knows how many times I've fallen short. We all fall short. That's the amazing thing about the grace of God." Tim Tebow

People have never been able to work their way to Heaven. Salvation has always been by the grace of God through faith.

Romans 4:6-8 says, ***"Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'"***

6. Was David saved by works?

_____

_____

_____

James 2:23 adds, ***"And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God."***

7. How was Abraham considered righteous?

_____
_____
_____

8. What does it mean to be called ***"a friend of God"***?

_____
_____
_____

"Saving faith is an immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, resting upon Him alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of God's grace." Charles Spurgeon

Salvation is by God's grace and through faith alone. This faith is also described as one who believes Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:5 says, ***"Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"***

9. What does ***"overcomes the world"*** mean?

_____
_____
_____

1 John 5:11-13 adds, ***"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."***

10. Can someone know they are saved?

_____
_____
_____

John 1:12 continues, ***"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."***

11. What are believers called?

_____
_____
_____

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

12. What are the two final destinations?

_____
_____
_____

13. What does one need to do to have eternal life?

_____
_____
_____

"What gives me the most hope every day is God's grace; knowing that his grace is going to give me the strength for whatever I face, knowing that nothing is a surprise to God." Rick Warren

NOTES

SALVATION | DEVOTION 1

JOHN 1:12

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." John 1:12 (NKJV)

My sister and brother-in-law are foster care parents. In seven years' time, they have provided a home for and cared for over 30 children. Most of these children come from absolutely devastating situations. Many are born addicted to drugs. Others are the only surviving child in a violent home. They come from physical abuse and neglect to sexual abuse and more. Each story is crushing. It is often painful work. It is thankless work. It is late nights, exhausting, tears, fear, frustration, and it can be overwhelming. It is especially painful when that child you love and have cared for, is put back into unacceptable situations. Some have a chance, and some will not make it. It is more than just "hard." With each phone call that comes to take another child, my brother-in-law and sister ask Jesus what He wants them to do. Very often, they say, "Yes, we will take them." We watch them make those children their own until their season together is done. It is thankless work. It is Jesus' work.

Now imagine if the richest man in history began to be burdened for abused children and decided to start doing foster care. Not just foster care, but his goal was the adoption of as many needy kids as possible. What if the richest man in the world began to adopt every child who wanted him? His mission was to make them his children. They would live in his home with him. They would eat from his table. They would bear his name. Each child would, from one day to the next, move from the devastation they had only ever known to the immeasurable blessing they would now only ever know. All that he has was now theirs. They were his children.

This is what the Bible says has happened to us. It is what God has done for us. From one moment to the next, everything is different. We were lost in

our sin and guilt, wandering around in the darkness, without hope, without purpose, and without joy. We were broken people. We were blind people, staggering around in a broken world. We were trying to find anything that seemed like life, anything that resembled purpose, anything that would make us happy even temporarily, and life failed. In every real way, life would fail. The key is “But God.” But God stepped into our lives. God stepped in with a mission, a goal, a plan, and a desire to adopt as many as were willing. He went to each lost, broken, and hurting child and offered them life. Therefore, ***“as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.”*** We became His own. We bear His name; we are Christians. We will eat at His table and live in His home with Him forever, and all that He has is ours. For, we are His.

And this all happened because we ***“received Him”*** when He came to us inviting us. We believed in His ability to do what He offered to do. Rejoice you ***“children of God”*** for He has received you!

SALVATION | DEVOTION 2

1 JOHN 5:5

PASTOR RYAN STORY

We live in a world with numerous amounts of religions, cults, and philosophies that claim to be able to get people to Heaven, or at least what they claim Heaven to be. I have had students ask me, "How do you know faith in Jesus is the only way to Heaven?" At times, I like to flip the question and ask them, "How do you know that Jesus is not the only way to Heaven?" It is enjoyable to watch them come up with a response. Sometimes we take that initial question as a threat, however, as time has passed, I have realized that the question usually comes from a longing for comfort in the face of uncertainty. No one in this world likes to walk around with uncertainty, especially when it comes to our eternal destination. There are many on both sides of what they have concluded about Jesus. On one side of the coin, the question, "How do you know faith in Jesus is the only way to Heaven?" has created a joyful eagerness to see Jesus when our time is up on this Earth. Because of the reassurance and hope putting our faith in Jesus brings, we know the answer to that question. Sadly, on the other side of that coin, we have a large amount of the world that claims that Jesus followers are arrogant, delusional, weak-minded, or flat out wrong.

In 1 John 5:5, it says, ***"Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"*** The world does not want to accept Jesus. In more than just a conflicting ideological way, the world is trying to destroy all things of God. Jesus even says, ***"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first."*** (John 15:18, NLT). With all the negativity that the world throws at Christ-followers, it is easy to forget this amazing verse. This is a simple verse to understand and a powerful verse to memorize and apply. How do we overcome the world? We overcome when we believe in Jesus and what Jesus did for us.

Now back to that amazing question I get asked. I like to respond with, "The reason I believe Jesus is the only way to Heaven is I follow the One who

has already won." After I get a look of confusion, I elaborate. The reason why Jesus is the only way for us to be saved can be simply put. The only one who can save us from death, Hell, and the grave is to follow the One who was victorious against death, Hell, and the grave. If you follow a person who loses, your outcome will be the same. If you follow someone who is victorious, then you will be victorious. Who is the most victorious person to ever live? If you said Jesus was the answer, you are correct. The only way for us to be overcomers is simply stated in 1 John, ***"Believe that Jesus is the Son of God."*** All the theological rhetoric that you may or may not fully grasp becomes clear when we simply put our faith in Jesus.

SALVATION | DEVOTION 3

ROMANS 3:20-24

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight." Romans 3:20

One of the important truths of the Scripture that we must understand is there has only ever been and only ever will be one means of salvation. For some this may be a radical thought that differs substantially from what you have been taught. Nonetheless, it is true. Throughout the whole of human history, one method of salvation has been given.

Some have, in error, taught that obedience to the Law of Moses was how the saints of the Old Testament were saved and reached the glory of Heaven. Romans 3:20, clearly teaches, ***"By works of the law no human being will be justified."*** Clearly, Abraham, Moses, David, and every other ancient saint was not justified, redeemed, or saved because of their adherence to the Mosaic Law. This principle continues today; no person regardless of the depth of their personal devotion can restore a right relationship with the God of the universe simply by following the letter of the law. Just a few verses later, Paul writes, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** We are unable to obey the law (James 2:10). So, if the law does not provide a means of salvation, what is the law's purpose? God has given us the law because ***"through the law comes knowledge of sin"*** (Romans 3:20). God's Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai with the sole purpose of revealing how far from God's holiness and perfection we truly are.

That understanding leads us to the great and rather depressing reality that we cannot save or rescue ourselves from God's wrath that is on us. The principle question of this portion of Romans chapter 3 is, "How can we be made right before God?" The Scripture says, ***"the righteousness of God***

has been manifested apart from the law…the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

God in His marvelous grace, sent Jesus to pay the price for our sin on the cross of Calvary. He was buried but rose again on the third day. It is through Christ's atoning work on the cross that the gift of salvation is offered to mankind. We receive that gift, ***"through faith."*** We believe in what Jesus did as the only means to rescue us from the deserved punishment from God that we were facing.

Back to the original point, God's Word gives only one way of restoring a right standing before a Holy God, ***"by grace you have been saved through faith."*** Abraham, Moses, David, and the saints prior to the cross looked forward in faith (see Hebrews chapter 11) to the cross, while we look back in faith to the work of Christ on the cross. Salvation has always ever been and always ever will be by grace through faith.

SALVATION | DEVOTION 4

JOHN 3:16

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

Do you remember the first time you read or heard the verse John 3:16? What did you think the first time you read that passage? For some, it was the day they confessed Christ as their Lord and Savior. For others, it started a time of questioning and digging deeper into the incredible book, God's Word. Yet, for some, it is simply a feel-good passage that is nice and can sell merchandise well.

John 3:16 says, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** As we read this passage, there is no question as to how one receives eternal life; it is solely through belief in Jesus Christ. This is the same belief that Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: ***"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 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 Scriptures."*** It is all about Jesus' death for our sins, His burial, and His glorious Resurrection! So, as we talk about the major theological topic of eternal life and Heaven, we understand that there is only one way, through one person, that this is gifted to humanity. It is solely through belief and confession in Jesus Christ.

One of the most beautiful parts of this whole passage is at the very beginning, ***"For God so loved the world."*** The Creator of the entire universe loves us. He loved His creation, made in His own image, so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for a broken and lost world that could never deserve the gift of eternal life.

SALVATION | DEVOTION 5

1 JOHN 5:11-13

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

A few years ago, I stopped by my bank on the way home from work to make a deposit. I cannot remember exactly what for, but I am not a huge fan of going to the bank. However, I now love all of the mobile banking apps out there. Sorry, you are not reading to hear about my banking preferences. So, as I walk out of the bank, I hear this lady yelling at me attempting to get my attention. For some reason, I was off of my game that day, I pride myself in being a pretty street smart person, and for some reason, I walked up to a stranger's car in a bank parking lot. Yes, not the smartest move I have ever made. As I approached her car, she did something I would never have expected; she began spraying me with cologne. I noticed she had hundreds of bottles in her car and it felt like her goal was to spray me with every one of them! I was caught off guard and was ready to walk away until she said the magic word, well at least the words that caught my attention, "I am running a DEAL today!" This was like magic to my ears; I love a good deal. She said that the bottles normally sell for $75, but today she was selling them for $20. I thought to myself, "How can I pass up on such a good deal?" So, we narrowed down to the best smelling one, and I handed over $20 to a lady in a bank parking lot, and she handed me the merchandise.

Now, I live about 5 minutes from my bank, and so I thought I would surprise my wife with my new smell. I knew she would be so excited about how good of a deal I got and also that I had some semblance of thought on personal smell. So, I sprayed myself a good dozen times on the ride home to the point my car, myself, and probably those cars around me could recognize how good I smelt! I arrived home and walked in with my chest held high in an attempt to impress my wife. She just looked at me in confusion and asked what I was doing. I moved closer sticking my chest out further hoping she would ask about my smell, and to my amazement,

she never did. At this point I was frustrated, so I skipped her asking me and told her the story of my amazing deal and how I thought she would be so impressed with me, but to my dismay, she was not. She just looked at me with a crooked face dissecting what I had just done. She said to me, "I think I recognize that bottle." I responded, "Of course you do, you have seen it at one of your fancy stores!" But she said, "No" and then a light went on, "I know where I have seen that bottle. You can buy it at the dollar store!" At that moment, I realized I had been taken in a bad deal. I was taken for $19 when I thought I had gained so much.

This is an embarrassing story, but one that shows how a bad deal can work. However, Jesus Christ has offered us the best deal of all, the grace of God. Salvation comes by grace and grace alone. It is not something we can earn by doing good things or deserve by living a "good" life. Simply putting our faith in Jesus Christ and trusting in His perfect plan, we too can have eternal life. He does not ask much of us because He already has done the heavy lifting on the cross. He conquered death, Hell, and the grave; His grace covers all of our sins.

We are told a powerful promise in 1 John 5:11-13, ***"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."*** Grace is a free gift; it is the best deal we could ever take. If you have never received this gift, make today the day. If you have the best deal of all time, make sure you appreciate the work done by Jesus and realize His grace is enough to cover all of your sins: past, present, and future.

SALVATION | DEVOTION 6

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10

Firmly, Awana stands. I grew up as a "church kid." Every Wednesday night, I was a part of a program called Awana, an acronym for, Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. The program focuses on Scripture memorization; currently, we have this program available for each of The River Church locations. Ephesians 2:8-10 is one of the passages I memorized in Awana that I have never forgotten. I am guilty; however, of skipping right over these verses because I have heard it so many times. We are never done learning, though, and fortunately, I continue to glean truth from passages I have heard over and over. We could spend hours on this particular passage, but I want to focus on four key words for this study.

The first word is ***"grace."*** Yes, you have probably heard the definition of grace as "unmerited favor," but what does that mean? Paul effectively explains the word grace in Ephesians 2:5. He says that ***"even when we were dead in our trespasses,*** [God] ***made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."*** In other words, when you had nothing, He gave everything. Romans 5:8 states, ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** To sin means to reject His ways, and to reject Him. I believe this verse should pull at all believers. Jesus died on the cross even when we were the ones spitting in his face. That, my friends, is grace.

The second word is ***"faith."*** Yes, it is by grace that we are saved, but Paul also makes a reference to faith in verse 8 (KJV), ***"for by grace are ye***

saved through faith." Faith is our response to salvation and our action. In chapter 1 verse 13, it says we hear the word of truth, and then we believe. Faith is also a gift of God, like grace (verse 8). It's all His gift to us; grace, faith, and salvation. Therefore, we cannot boast of faith because it is only through God's grace that we have faith. Tony Merida, in Christ Centered Exposition, says, "Faith is the instrument by which we lay hold of Christ."

The third word is ***"boast."*** When we "get grace," we can understand that boasting about our part in salvation and faith is laughable. Paul says it well in the first chapter of his first letter to Corinthians when he says, ***"So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'"*** (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). Church, let us boast in the Lord. Let us boast about Him at our work, with our family, and in our neighborhood.

The final word is ***"works."*** Scripture clearly says we are not saved because of good works, but rather as followers of Christ, we are created to do good works. Ephesians 4:24 puts it this way, ***"Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*** Again, we do not do good works to be saved, but I believe the reverse is the truth we need to understand. If good works are not evident in our lives and we have no desire to follow Him and to live for him, then where is the salvation? Salvation takes us to good works.

What an amazing passage! I challenge you to memorize this passage and make it part of your life.

3

THE TRINITY

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



The Godhead eternally exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections. God the Father is fully God. God the Son is fully God. God the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Bible presents this as fact. It does not explain it.

1. Who are the three persons of the Trinity?

_____

_____

_____

2. Which one do you relate to most or best? Why?

_____

_____

_____

Four words into the Bible, ***"In the beginning God,"*** we already have the Trinity implied. The Hebrew word used for ***"God,"*** Elohim, is in the plural form which seems to refer to a triune God. God, (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) created the heavens and the earth.

"All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love.' But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love." C.S. Lewis

3. Explain either point in your own words.

_____

_____

_____

Liberty University declares, "We affirm our belief in one God, infinite Spirit, creator, and sustainer of all things, who exists eternally in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one in essence but distinct in person and function.

We affirm that the Father is the first person of the Trinity and the source of all that God is and does. From Him, the Son is eternally generated, and from Them, the Spirit eternally proceeds. He is the designer of creation, the speaker of revelation, the author of redemption, and the sovereign of history.

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, eternally begotten from the Father. He is God. He was conceived by the virgin Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He lives forever as perfect God and perfect man: two distinct natures inseparably united in one person.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son and equal in deity. He is the giver of all life, active in the creating and ordering of the universe; He is the agent of inspiration and the new birth; He restrains sin and Satan; and He indwells and sanctifies all believers."

4. What are the responsibilities of God the Father?

_____

_____

_____

5. What are the responsibilities of God the Son?

_____

_____

_____

6. What are the responsibilities of God the Holy Spirit?

_____

_____

_____

Matthew 28:18-19 says, ***"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"***

7. What is implied by having all three Persons of the Godhead listed?

_____
_____
_____

Christianity is a monotheistic religion. Mark 12:29 says, ***"Jesus answered, 'The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'""***

8. How does this verse add to the discussion of a triune God?

_____
_____
_____

"It is commonly said that the Trinity is a mystery. And it certainly is. But it is not a mystery veiled in darkness in which we can only grope and guess. It is a mystery in which we are given to understand that we will never know all there is of God. It is not a mystery that keeps us in the dark, but a mystery in which we are taken by the hand and gradually led into the light." Eugene Peterson

John 1:1 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** Verse 14 adds, ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

9. Who was (and is) the Word?

_____
_____
_____

10. Does this relate to the topic? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

Matthew 3:16-17 describes events that happened at the baptism of Jesus, ***"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"***

11. How were all three Persons present and involved at the baptism of Jesus?

_____

_____

_____

Acts chapter 5 describes the story of Ananias selling a property and telling the apostles that he gave them all the money. Verses 3-4 record, ***"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.'"***

12. Other than the apostles, who did Ananias lie to (two answers)?

_____

_____

_____

2 Corinthians 13:14 adds, ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."***

13. How does this verse add to the discussion of a triune God?

_____

_____

_____

14. Why are the different traits (grace, love, and fellowship) associated with each Person?

_____

_____

_____

The belief in the Trinity is essential, but that does not mean we have to fully understand it. John Wesley said, “Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God.”

NOTES

THE TRINITY | DEVOTION 1

MATTHEW 3:16-17

PASTOR RYAN STORY

When I was new to the parenting game, figuring out holiday traditions was one of the more enjoyable conversations I had with my wife. One Easter, my wife and I decided that we would get our boys gifts that would have to fit into three categories: something fun, something to wear, and something to read. We agreed that we wanted to make sure any books we purchased had some "Jesus merit" to them. While wandering around a Christian bookstore, my wife found cute books about the ark, Bible sight words, and other colorful age-appropriate books for my, at the time, infant son and year-and-a-half son. What did I find you ask? I somehow found a children's book about one of the hardest topics to explain. Yes, I found a children's book that helps explain the Holy Trinity! My wife thought I was insane for getting this book because our sons would not be able to understand the complexity of the Trinity. However, in due time, I know I will need to teach my sons one of the most complex and necessary theological concepts.

The very difficult part of understanding the Trinity is there are only a handful of moments when God is fully present in all three persons. One of the easiest moments to see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit present is when Jesus is baptized. Matthew 3:16-17 says, ***"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"*** At this moment we see Jesus, the Son, being baptized. We read the God, the Father, saying that Jesus was ***"my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*** Lastly, we see the Spirit of God descending like a dove. The account in Matthew might be the easiest story to see Father, Son, and Spirit all interacting with each other.

We have to understand that God operates in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. We also must look at God as one, Father, Son and Spirit are God. We must also know that each person of the Trinity has a different role. All three are all God, but all three "operate" differently. Run that through a few mental filters and when your brain starts to hurt you will be where you need to be when it comes to understanding the Trinity! Many people brush aside complex theology and leave it to a Pastor or scholars, but understanding the Trinity is so important!

When you look at any relationship you have, there are different complexities to it. I am a son of my father and a father to my son. I never treat my son as my father, and my father never treats my son like his son. It is important to understand that how we operate about others brings closeness. Way back in my young adult days I was given the opportunity to preach. At that time, I lived in complex theology, and I wrote a sermon titled "A Shallow View of the Trinitarian Godhead, Creates a Shallow Doxological Response." I look back on that and realize I was a bit of a showoff. I should have simply titled this message "Not Knowing All Three Members of the Trinity Personally, Can Affect the Way You Worship God." This is why Matthew chapter 3 is so important. It is a perfect story to see all three members of the Trinity at work at the same time. At some point, I will have to teach my sons about God as Trinity, and this will be a tough task. I am welcoming the struggle because knowing them all personally will help the way my boys worship.

THE TRINITY | DEVOTION 2

COLOSSIANS 2:9

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Colossians 2:9

Several years ago, my family and I went on a trip to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. While we were there, we decided to go to an escape room. We had a choice of which room to choose: beginner, novice, or expert. I have no idea why, but for some reason, we chose the expert room. This was silly on our part because none of us had ever been to an escape room before. The room we chose was a ship that was sinking, and we had to escape. Needless to say, we all went down with the ship. The truth is we did not understand what we were doing.

The concept of the Trinity is difficult to understand as well. There is really no way to perfectly understand the Trinity with our human minds. The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, but its truth is. The Bible teaches that there is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, ***"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."*** Yet, the Bible also teaches that God exists in three coequal and co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The members of the Trinity are three individual persons and are all God. The Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Colossians 2:9), and the Holy Spirit is God (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Some teach a polytheistic view of the Trinity. They say the three persons of the Trinity are three separate gods. This view is not compatible with the Bible. A name frequently used for God in the Hebrew language is Elohim, which is a plural word. In Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:7, and Isaiah 6:8, the plural pronoun "us" is used when God is speaking of Himself.

Some teach a modalistic view of the Trinity, which teaches that there is one God who changes to one of the three modes of the Father, the Son,

or the Holy Spirit. This is not compatible with the Bible either. In Matthew 3:16-17, all three persons of the Trinity are present. When Jesus the Son came up from the water, after being baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove, and God the Father spoke audibly.

The Trinity is one of the most challenging doctrines of the Bible to understand. Why is it important? Through the Trinity, we gain an understanding of who God is and how He works. The Trinity helps us understand God's loving nature. Love did not begin at creation. God existed eternally in a relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit, bound in perfect love. God the Father demonstrates this love by sending God the Son (John 3:16). God the Son demonstrates love by stepping down from Heaven to pay the price for our sins with His life (Philippians 2:6-8). God the Holy Spirit demonstrates love by indwelling, empowering, convicting, guiding, comforting, and interceding for every believer who has faith in Jesus (John 14:26).

The Trinity gives believers the example and the ability to love like God. John 13:34 says, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."***

MATTHEW 28:19

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

At the time of Jesus, polytheism (the belief and worship of more than one god or goddess) was the major religious viewpoint. Except for the Jewish Nation, who were monotheistic (believed and worshipped one God), the belief in many gods and goddesses was essentially a globally accepted idea. The prophets of the Old Testament stood against Israel's acceptance of other gods (Deuteronomy 6:4 says, ***"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."***), while the apostles in the New Testament spoke against the predominantly Greco-Roman worship of many gods and goddesses. Jesus came and unequivocally declared Himself as God (more about that next week), but made it clear that He was doing only the will of His Father. Other than the cross of Calvary, no greater and more emotional example of this exists than in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed, ***"My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"*** (Matthew 26:39). Jesus had authority over sickness, disease, demons, weather, and the whole of creation, yet He willingly submitted His will to God the Father. In the same way, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, telling the disciples, ***"He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you"*** (John 16:14). We see very plainly in Scripture God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Please understand, not three gods, but one God in three persons. We would say, the triune God. Christians are not polytheists; we are monotheists. We believe in one God, who exists in three distinct persons. The study of the Trinity is like exploring a profound mystery, and yet within the pages of the Scripture the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit are seen and more importantly, presented as one.

In Matthew chapter 28 as Jesus is preparing His disciples for His eventual ascension into Heaven, the Lord gives to His followers what we have come to know as "The Great Commission." Jesus charges His followers with the mission of preaching the Gospel throughout the world, and then ***"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** (verse 19). The commission to those believers and to us is not to casually be acquainted with or even benign to the Trinitarian existence of God, but to take practical action that acknowledges the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but a truly saved person will be baptized, publically declaring their faith that God sent His Son to die on the cross and rise again three days later. Jesus then sent the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us. Even as Jesus, who was baptized by John in Matthew chapter 3, comes up out of the water, the audible voice of God the Father is heard, and the Holy Spirit is seen descending like a dove on Jesus. The Trinity was present at the baptism of Jesus and is present at all future baptisms as well.

THE TRINITY | DEVOTION 4

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

Describing the Trinity is an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task. The word “Trinity” cannot even be found in the Bible, yet it is a crucial piece of our walk and understanding of God. We see the Trinity made up of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. As a child, we sang a song that described the Trinity and its components. The song closed with “three in one, three in one.” As a child, and even now, the concept of “three in one” is mind-blowing! I have always said that if someone claims to fully be able to explain the Trinity, then run because they have no idea what they are saying. I am not sure if that is a good statement, but fully understanding the Trinity means to fully understand God and His character and this is something our finite brains can never fully grasp.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, ***“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*** This verse is something that I think every believer must understand. “I realize I cannot fully understand God, yet my faith in Him is willing to trust Him and His plan and my response is to live for Him every day.” The Bible tells us that we must have a “child-like” faith to believe in God and this is something that we as followers of Christ must cling to especially when walking through tough concepts like the Trinity.

However, as we look at the Trinity, we see three components that make it up: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working in unison to establish a relationship with you. 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*** We see the three characteristics of the Trinity described by Paul in 2 Corinthians as grace, love, and fellowship. All three pointing back to the Gospel and God’s desire for us to be saved. J. I. Packer, a

world renowned theologian, describes the Trinity like this, “The Trinity is the basis of the Gospel, and the Gospel is a declaration of the Trinity in action.” The Trinity is three forms of God in action to declare the Gospel to a broken world. The grace of Jesus came to the earth to die on a cross for our sins. The love of God is perfect and true and will never stop pursuing a relationship with us. Finally, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit walks with us everyday, comforting, leading, guiding, and directing our steps. We see all three forms with different characteristics, yet acting in unison pointing us toward a relationship with God. So, just as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, I write to you, ***“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*** (2 Corinthians 13:14, NLT).

THE TRINITY | DEVOTION 5

MATTHEW 1:23

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'" Matthew 1:23 (NKJV)

An egg. An apple. Water. What do they have in common? They have all been used to try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to children and adults alike. The basic concept of the Trinity seems simple on its surface. It is easy to say that God is "three persons in one." But when your five-year-old begins to ask questions, you quickly realize the answer is not so simple. Enter the humble egg as an attempted illustration of the Trinity. It is three parts: shell, white, and yolk existing as one egg. A single apple consists of three parts as well: the skin, the flesh, and the core. Water can exist in three forms, a liquid, a solid (ice), and a gas (steam). These illustrations, however helpful they might be, do not perfectly convey the Trinity (because each "thing" is a different "thing"). Like an exercise bicycle, it feels that the harder you push to understand or explain the Trinity, the more difficult it becomes. However, just because the concept of the Trinity is difficult to wrap our minds around, does not mean that we should disregard it. It is vital!

First things first, the word "Trinity" (a tri-unity - three in one) is not in the Bible. However, the concept is. The Trinity, meaning that the one true God exists in three persons, is taught throughout the Scriptures. We see the doctrine of the Trinity taught from Genesis to Revelation. To understand it, we have to keep it simple. The Bible says that there is ONE God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, ***"Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"*** We find that not only is the Father called God, but the Son, Jesus is called God, and the Holy Spirit is called God. God is ***"one."***

Jesus is a good starting point. Key passages make it clear that Jesus is God. John 1:1-2 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and was God. He was in the beginning with God."*** Then verse 14 (NKJV) adds, ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*** John 10:30 (NKJV) says, ***"I and the Father are One."*** Thomas' confession of Him when he saw the risen Jesus is very pointed, ***"My Lord and my God!"*** (John 20:28, NKJV). Titus 2:13 (NKJV) says that we as His people are ***"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*** Colossians 1:15-17 (NKJV) also shows that Jesus is God, ***"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."*** There are many other passages stating Jesus is God. Jesus is called God throughout the Bible.

The Holy Spirit is also God. In Acts chapter 5, we read that Ananias and his wife Sapphira are said to have lied to the Holy Spirit. However, verse 4 (NKJV) says, ***"You have not lied to men but to God."*** John 6:63 tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who ***"gives life."*** That is something that only God is said to be able to do. In the Genesis account of Creation, we see the Holy Spirit hovering above the deep (waters) involved in the creation, something that only God is said to have done. The Spirit is said to be all-knowing, everywhere at once, all-powerful, and eternal. These are attributes that only God possesses.

On a technical note, in the opening words of the Bible found in Genesis 1:1, we read, ***"In the beginning God."*** What you may not know is that in Hebrew (the original language of the Old Testament), the word ***"God"*** there is the plural form of a singular noun. It is "Gods as one" if you will. Not just "gods" making God "polytheistic" (multiple gods), it is describing right from the opening words a "plurality within the one God." Just a few chapters later in the Genesis account, we read of God making man using the words, ***"Let us make man in our image."*** It is incredible.

The New Testament shows us the Trinity continually. 1 John 5:7 (NKJV) says it clearly, ***"For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit and these three are one."*** All three persons of the Trinity are seen together in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19 (NKJV), ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** At the baptism of Jesus, we see all three persons of the Trinity at once: ***"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"*** In Revelation 4:8, we see the angels of God crying out the threefold, ***"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."*** They use the word ***"holy"*** three times for just one God.

We may not be able to explain how three persons can exist as one God, but that is what the Bible teaches. Perhaps, rather than the picture of an apple or an egg, maybe we should use math? God is not 1+1+1=3, but rather 1x1x1=1.

THE TRINITY | DEVOTION 6

JOHN 1:1

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

Recently, I visited the Nation of Israel. We went to the Western Wall and watched as many Jews came to the wall to pray to God. The Jews believe this is the closest that they can get to God's glory. The Bible tells us in Exodus 40:34, ***"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."*** We know that the glory of the Lord fell upon the tabernacle. To this day, Jews will go to the Western Wall because this is closest they can get to what is left of the old temple. The sad part is that they have missed where the glory of God is and has gone. The glory of God came as flesh as John chapter one would go on to describe as Jesus.

John 1:1 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** This verse is so simple that a child could understand it, but yet so deep we could spend months studying it. This chapter is the proclamation that God's glory rests on His Son and that God came down in the flesh as Jesus. Three clear points are made here in verse one. First, the Word was in the beginning. This does not mean a specific period of time. The beginning could also be translated the source. This is saying that the Word was the start. The Word was before all and the source of all. John MacArthur, a biblical teacher and pastor, says, "The word of the Lord was the expression of divining power and wisdom." The second part of this verse says, ***"the Word was with God."*** This has stated the separation of the Word and God. MacArthur also goes on to say that this is a picture of, "2 personal beings facing one another and enjoying intelligent discourse."

Lastly, we have the statement, ***"the Word was God."*** If you have ever had a Jehovah's Witness come to your door, this is one of the first places they will start. They are okay with the word being the beginning, and the word

being with God, but they object to the truth that the ***"Word was God."*** When we read John 1:14, we see who ***"the Word"*** is: ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** The Word (Jesus) became flesh. Jesus took up residence among us.

The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it continually supports itself.

"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." John 1:18

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Colossians 2:9

"To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." Romans 9:5

"To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:1

These verses amazingly describe the Father and Son aspect of the Trinity. I challenge you to read 2 Corinthians 3 to see how the Holy Spirit fits into and completes this Holy Trinity that we trust.

4

JESUS IS GOD

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



“You say to-MAY-to, I say to-MAH-to.” The tomato has taken much scrutiny. Not only is there discrepancy on how to pronounce the word, but there is also debate on whether it is a fruit or vegetable.

Tomatoes are the state vegetable of New Jersey, but they are the official state fruit of Ohio. However, Arkansas resolved the issue by having the tomato be both the state vegetable and the state fruit.

You might be asking, “What is the big deal?” In 1887, U.S. tariff laws imposed a duty on vegetables, but not on fruits. The Supreme Court ruled that tomatoes were to be considered vegetables because they were eaten with the meal and not dessert. However, the courts did not reclassify the tomato botanically; it is still a fruit.

1. Do you view the tomato as a fruit or vegetable?

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Tomatoes are not that big of a deal, but who Jesus is, deserves serious consideration. Was He a good man, a crazy man, or God?

2. When you picture Jesus in your mind, do you view Him as a man or God?

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The Bible is very clear that Jesus was both a man and God. He was (and is) not “a” God, but God Himself.

Isaiah 7:14 says, ***“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** God said that the Messiah would be born even though His mother had never “been with a man.” This miracle would be a clear indicator that His Son had arrived. He even tells us His name. ***“Immanuel”*** means “God with us.” When Jesus was born, it meant God was with us because He is God.

3. What thoughts come to mind when you think of the name Immanuel (or Emmanuel)?

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"Emmanuel. God with us. He who resided in Heaven, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, willingly descended into our world. He breathed our air, felt our pain, knew our sorrows, and died for our sins. He didn't come to frighten us, but to show us the way to warmth and safety." Chuck Swindoll

Isaiah 9:6 adds, ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."***

4. Who is the ***"child"*** this verse is addressing? Does this verse say or imply that the ***"son"*** is God?

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John 1:1 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** Verse 14 completes a thought, ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

5. Who is the ***"Word?"*** What does it say about Him?

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Even Jesus' enemies knew how He viewed Himself. John 5:18 says, ***"This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."***

6. How did Jesus view and speak of Himself?

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In John 8:58, Jesus makes a very bold statement, ***"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'"*** Abraham was about 2,000 years before Jesus. The claim referred back to Exodus 3:14, ***"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"'*** God had called Himself ***"I Am."*** When Jesus called Himself ***"I Am,"*** He was saying He is God.

7. What is stated by the tense (past, present, future, or other) of ***"I Am"***?

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"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." C.S. Lewis

In John 10:30-33 Jesus boldly says, ***"'I and the Father are one.' The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.'"***

8. Which points stand out in this passages?

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John 20:28 is short but powerful, ***"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"***

9. What distinction is being made between Lord and God?

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"Fundamentally, our Lord's message was Himself. He did not come merely to preach a Gospel; He himself is that Gospel. He did not come merely to give bread; He said, 'I am the bread.' He did not come merely to shed light; He said, 'I am the light.' He did not come merely to show the door; He said, 'I am the door.' He did not come merely to name a shepherd; He said, 'I am the shepherd.' He did not come merely to point the way; He said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'" J. Sidlow Baxter

In Colossians 2:9, Paul described Jesus as being God, ***"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."***

10. What does this mean?

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Paul adds in Philippians 2:5-8, ***"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."***

11. What statements express Jesus' deity?

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Hebrews 1:1–3 also says, ***"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."***

12. What statements express Jesus' deity?

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"The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth." Henry Morris

NOTES

JESUS IS GOD | DEVOTION 1

JOHN 1:1

PASTOR RYAN STORY

I enjoy writing devotions. I enjoy getting different topics to study and then write about that topic. I enjoy studying, learning, and writing. This is one of those devotions I did not enjoy writing as much as devotions past. Not because of the topic, the topic of Jesus is God is amazing! Ideas, stories, analogies, and truths that can be applied that flow from this fact are numerous and beyond count! The reason this devotion was not that enjoyable was that in just three words one could sum up every clever, insightful thing I could possibly say: Jesus is God. There is nothing else that needs to be said. Jesus being God is such a fundamental fact in my mind, my mind would not let me go any further. I almost wanted to just increase the size of the font and say, "Jesus is God." Those three words would cover the whole page, and it would be my entire devotion. That is all that needs to be said about this topic.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, he starts his account of Jesus' life with some poetry. I love reading the Gospel of John because Matthew, Mark, and Luke write similar styles and even use each other as sources in their accounts. Then you have John who is super poetic and full of imagery. In John 1:1, he says ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** In John 1:14 he continues, ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** So we can use some simple deductive reasoning. By looking logically at the premises, we can draw a conclusion. Since ***"the Word was God"*** that means that God is the Word. Since the ***"Word became flesh and dwelt among us"*** means that God became flesh and dwelt among us. Finally, since Jesus was the part of the Trinity that became flesh to dwell among us, that concludes that Jesus is God.

We have already discussed the fact that everything in the Bible is true and comes from the creator of the universe. We must make the fact that "Jesus is God" a truer statement of our lives than us telling ourselves the sun will come up the next morning. "Jesus is God" must be the truest fact in all of our lives.

EXODUS 3:14 + JOHN 8:58

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

After shepherding for forty years in absolute obscurity in the Arabian wilderness, God appeared and spoke to Moses. Forty years earlier, Moses had fled Egypt as a murderer and fugitive from Egyptian justice. He now stood with a bush burning before Him, ablaze with the holy glory of God. In this literal Holy Ground moment, God reveals to Moses that He, the Lord, is going to finally free His people from Egyptian bondage and bring them to the long Promised Land. God invites Moses to be His voice to the Pharaoh and the entire nation of Israel. We know from the book of Acts, that Moses while growing up and living like a prince of Egypt, ***"was mighty in his words and deeds"*** (Acts 7:22). But that was four decades ago and in Moses' mind, must have felt like a distant dream. Yet, here was God, calling this fugitive shepherd to return to the place of his upbringing and crime, to, through the mighty power of God, deliver the people of God from slavery. Moses trembled before the glory of God and God's call, and asked, ***"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" And God answered him, 'I AM WHO I AM…Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you'""*** (Exodus 3:13-14). And what followed this conversation was truly one of the most extraordinary sequences of events the world has ever experienced.

Centuries later, Jesus was approached by the Pharisees while He was teaching in the temple. With a great amount of bitterness and venom, they hurled insults at Jesus, even questioning the moral standing and legitimacy of His birth. As the vicious attacks built to a crescendo, Jesus speaks of Abraham. The Jewish leaders were particularly protective (and possessive) of Abraham, Moses, and King David. Jesus tells them, ***"Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day…He saw it and was***

glad." Puzzled, the Jewish leaders responded, ***"You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"*** Here's the final exchange: ***"Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple"*** (Acts 8:56-59).

Jesus definitively at this moment declares that He is God, referring back to Exodus chapter 3 and claiming for Himself the name of God. Jesus leaves no doubt for His listeners by saying, ***"I AM."*** They knew precisely what Jesus was saying. This is proven by the fact that they were so enraged by what they viewed as a blasphemous claim that they instantly went from seething anger to a willingness to commit murder.

This event, among many others in the ministry of Christ, proves that Jesus did not simply claim to be a man deeply in tune with spiritual things, a prophet, or a moral teacher. He claimed to be the God of the Old Testament, the burning bush come in the flesh. At the risk of overstating the point, this is a major of the highest order. Followers of Jesus can never back down from this doctrine which Christ taught. Jesus Christ is God. He was not part of a group of gods nor did He become a God because of His extraordinary life. He was God, is God, and will return one day to earth to visibly demonstrate His authority as God.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)

If you asked 100 people to tell you who Jesus is, you might get 100 different answers! But I tend to believe that those 100 answers would fall into just four basic categories. It is just four separate "buckets" if you will. The first bucket would hold every answer that suggested that Jesus was (as the saying goes) a "good teacher." In other words, He was a religious man, perhaps more religious than others, who taught us about God and His ways. The second bucket would hold every answer given that suggested that Jesus was crazy. Every answer in this bucket would be some form of the idea that Jesus was a lunatic. The thought here is that Jesus was nothing special, but that He (and others) thought He was more than others are. The third bucket would contain all the answers that suggested that Jesus was a fake. These answers would all convey the idea that Jesus knew He was nothing, but pretended to be something to deceive people and lead them astray. The fourth bucket would hold every answer that said that Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be. Jesus was God. He, as God, came to live among us. Every word that came from Him was God speaking. Every work done by Him was God's work. He truly is the Way, the Truth, and the Life as He said.

C.S. Lewis once wrote regarding the answers people might give to the question, "Who is Jesus?": "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept

Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

Jesus is God. He is not "a god" among other "gods." He is not a "lesser god." He is not a "god-like" man who taught us about the true God. There is only one God, and He is that God. He is God, who created all things and brought them into their existence. He is God, and as such, rules over all things and has given you and I life. There was never a moment when He came to be. He has always been. Everything came to be by Him and through His power. He was not created. He created all things.

So, what exactly happened 2,000 years ago? God came down. God came as a baby born to a woman. His name was called Immanuel because it was God now dwelling among us. That baby grew up and eventually took all of our sins upon Himself and died in our place on a cross. God died for us, for our sin. God came, God died, and then God rose from the dead. Jesus is God.

JESUS IS GOD | DEVOTION 4

JOHN 10:30-33

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

"I and the Father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.'" John 10:30-33

"The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." C.S. Lewis

Jesus said, ***"I and the Father are one."*** This statement was mind-blowing for the culture Jesus lived in and for our culture today. How could a man actually be God? The crowd responded to Jesus' claim in outrage and were ready to kill Him for this claim. How could this Jesus be a man whose heart beat, perspired when hot, cried when sad, and bled and bruised just like me? This concept is crazy, yet is crucial to understanding our walk with God. You see, Jesus came as a man to experience life as we know it. He was tempted, He grew physically and mentally, and experienced many things a boy and man would experience in that culture, but why? Why would the God of all of the universe come in the form of a man? The answer is simple; it is for you and me!

When Jesus was under trial in front of Pilate and the High Priest, the Pharisees were pushing Pilate to sentence Jesus to death; Pilate was disturbed. He could not find fault with this man, but they wanted Him killed for one reason, He claimed to be God. This claim brought huge weight and attention from all over Jerusalem and something the religious world did not like. Pilate brought Jesus inside, away from the crowd, to have a conversation with Him. Pilate asked Jesus in John 18:37, ***"Then Pilate***

said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" Jesus came into the world as a reigning King and was born in a barn around animals. There was no pomp and circumstance to His birth, yet the Almighty God was born that day simply on a mission of truth, and that truth would set the captives free!

God stepped out of Heaven and into our earth in the form of a man. This takes faith to believe, but understanding why He did it is crucial to our walk with Christ. He did not do it to waste His time because He was bored in Heaven or that He could come down and punish this world because we had fallen so far away from how He created us. He did it so that He could spread the truth of how much He (God) loves us and desires a relationship with us. Luke 19:10 says, ***"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost!"***

JESUS IS GOD | DEVOTION 5

ISAIAH 9:6

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

From the earliest pages of Scripture, God reveals Himself as powerful, holy, and deeply personal. The prophets foretold of a coming King, one who would not only rule but carry divine titles. Isaiah's prophecy is striking: a child would be born, yet this child would be called Mighty God.

The weight of this promise finds its fulfillment not just in a manger in Bethlehem but in the very opening lines of the Gospel of John. John 1:1 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** Later, John 1:14 adds, ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*** John echoes the opening of Genesis but reframes it around the person of Jesus, whom he calls "the Word." Not only was Jesus present at creation, but He is the Creator. Not only was He with God, but He is God. It is then that John gives the most staggering truth of all: this God came to live among us.

Jesus is not merely a messenger from God. He is the Message, and the Maker clothed in flesh, the invisible God made visible. His character, actions, and words are not merely reflections of divinity; they are divinity! Every time He extended compassion to the outcast, healed the broken, forgave the sinner, or rebuked hypocrisy, we see God's heart on full display.

He is the Wonderful Counselor because His wisdom surpasses our human understanding. He is Mighty God because He calms storms, raises the dead, and He Himself conquers both sin and death. He is the Word made

flesh, not a representative, but the very presence of God reaching out to humanity in love and truth.

This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith: Jesus is God. He is not just sent by God, not just like God, but He IS God. This changes everything, or at least it should! If He is God, then we cannot approach Him casually; we must worship. If He is God, we cannot ignore His words; we must obey. If He is God, we are not left to wander in darkness because He is the light that no darkness can overcome.

When you think of Jesus, do you recognize Him as God in the flesh, worthy of your full trust, reverence, surrender, and obedience?

JOHN 20:28

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

Have you ever been mistaken for someone? Has someone ever had a conversation with you and the entire time they thought you were someone else? Sadly, this happens to me all too often in my life. My brother Jim is 21 years older than me. This brings great confusion to people when they see me and then, they see him. I cannot tell you how many times people have come to me asking how my father is doing, and then I inform them that I am not who they think I am.

In John chapter 20, Jesus has risen from the grave; He has made appearances to many people including some of the disciples. Thomas is one of the disciples who has great doubt that Jesus has risen from the grave because he has yet to see Him. He tells the other disciples that he will only believe if he can see Jesus and can see the scars from the crucifixion. Well, Jesus shows up and Thomas makes this amazing statement in verse 28, ***"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and My God!'"***

Thomas' statement begs the questions, Is Jesus God or did Thomas mistake him for the wrong person? I believe Jesus' response confirms clearly that Jesus is God. If Jesus was not God, do you think He would let Thomas mistakenly call Him King of kings and Lord of lords? As we keep reading the passage, Jesus asks Thomas in the next verse, ***"Have you believed because you have seen me?"*** If Jesus is not God, I do not believe He would allow Thomas to call Him God. It would be a very blasphemous statement against God.

Throughout the Bible, there is this beautiful picture of Jesus and God being separate, and being the same. For a fun little study read Daniel 7:9-10 and Revelation 1:12-16. Daniel is clearly referring to God while Revelation is clearly referring to Jesus. Compare the similarities between the two. You

will be amazed at how the same characteristics that are used to describe God are the same characteristics to describe Christ Jesus.

5

JESUS WAS SINLESS

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



This lesson addresses Jesus as sinless but also includes His virgin birth. This is an extremely important topic. Christian Answers reported, "Larry King, the CNN talk show host, was once asked who he would most want to interview if he could choose anyone from all of history. He said, 'Jesus Christ.' The questioner said, 'And what would you like to ask Him?' King replied, 'I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me.'"

1. Who would you like to meet from history? Why?

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2. What would you ask them?

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Isaiah 7:14 records this amazing miracle, ***"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*** Never before did the words ***"virgin"*** and ***"conceive"*** coincide. Conceive implies that she is no longer a virgin.

N. T. Wright observed, "First-century folk knew every bit as well as we do that babies are produced by sexual intercourse. When, in Matthew's version of the story, Joseph heard about Mary's pregnancy, his problem arose not because he didn't know the facts of life, but because he did."

3. Were your parents comfortable talking about "the birds and the bees"?

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There is a tendency or movement within our "Christian" society to downplay the virgin birth. J.A. Medders listed seven questions to ask anyone who does not believe the virgin birth was important.

- Jesus was, or was not, miraculously placed in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit?
- If he was not, why would Matthew (Matthew 1:18–25) and Luke (Luke 1:26–38) say so? Are they liars or hype-men for Jesus?
- If Jesus was not born of the Virgin Mary, how did the eternal Son of God enter this world?
- If he was not virgin-born, when and where did the divine nature of the man Jesus come from? Joseph's sperm? Mary's egg? Or the divine nature Jesus always had from eternity, via the virgin birth?
- If Jesus was not divinely placed in Mary's womb, it was an ordinary conception—normal fertilization—do you think Jesus became God at some point? What other option is there?
- If Jesus was not placed in Mary's womb by the Spirit, how is Jesus free from the stain of Adam's sin? Without the virgin birth, we don't have a sinless substitute, we have no atonement, and we have no resurrection.
- Why pick one miracle over another? Why believe in a dead man coming back to life, never dying again, and reigning over the Universe—and not the virgin birth?

John F. MacArthur, Jr. adds, "The virgin birth is an underlying assumption of everything the Bible says about Jesus. To throw out the virgin birth is to reject Christ's deity, the accuracy and authority of Scripture, and a host of other related doctrines that are the heart of the Christian faith. No issue is more important than the virgin birth to our understanding of who Jesus is. If we deny Jesus is God, we have denied the very essence of Christianity."

Jesus was not born with a sin nature. From the start, He was perfect. Every day He chose to keep it that way. Scripture is very clear that He never sinned. If He had sinned, He could not be the sacrificial lamb for us.

"Going By Faith" lists ten sins that people often overlook or accept in their daily walk:

- Holding grudges
- Justifying wrong attitudes
- Putting your desires first (before God)

- Feeling annoyed over the success of others
- Getting hurt easily and reacting out of the hurt
- Underpaying (taking advantage of others' work)
- Skimping on the work you are being paid to do
- Criticizing and finding fault — secretly or outwardly
- Focusing on the cares of the world — putting your full attention and trust in the "things" of the world, like money, power, possessions, and image. When we allow that to define us, we lose focus of who we are in Christ. This does not mean not caring about what happens in the world.
- Gossiping or speaking unkindly of those not present

4. Are all of these sins?

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5. Which is most common?

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The Bible is very clear about Jesus living a perfect life. He never sinned through inappropriate actions. He never sinned with inappropriate words. He never sinned with inappropriate thoughts. He never sinned!

Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:22, ***"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."***

6. Who is this verse discussing?

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Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

7. What does this verse mean?

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The author of Hebrews writes (4:15), ***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."***

8. How are temptation and sin different from each other?

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John writes in 1 John 3:5, ***"You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin."***

9. Why did Jesus come to earth?

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10. Why is it important that ***"in him there is no sin?"***

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John 19:4 Pilate went out again and said to them, ***"See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him."***

11. How many different people recorded that Jesus was sinless?

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Isaiah 53:9 contains valuable prophecy, ***"And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."***

12. How was Jesus' grave with the wicked?

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13. How was Jesus' death with a rich man?

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14. What else does this prophecy say about Jesus (the Messiah)?

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1 Peter 1:18-19 ***"Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."***

15. How is Jesus described here?

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James 4:17 takes sin to a whole different level, ***"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."***

16. What are some sins of commission?

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In talking about the impeccability (whether or not Jesus could sin) of Christ, Charles C. Ryrie describes both sides, “One says that He was able not to sin while the other states that He was not able to sin. In either case He did not sin.”

Jesus did not sin; therefore, He could and did die for our sins. Thank You, Jesus!

NOTES

JOHN 19:4

PASTOR RYAN STORY

We all know that critical person who can find something wrong in every situation. We all know the person who will say it is too hot or too cold outside. You know that person who is unhappy if their food takes too long to get to their table. They are the person who can spot cobwebs from fifty feet away and say that an entire room is filthy. We all know that person who is more focused on their preference than principles. Sadly, we all have moments of being critical, we all have the pet-peeves that drive us crazy. Think of the way we start to treat people when they do not live up to our expectations. If a waiter takes too long to deliver food, we instantly jump to the conclusion that they are out to get us. We are so quick to find fault with people. Even worse, we are quick to finding fault with God as well.

In John chapter 19, Jesus is in the middle of a very bad night. The Pharisee leaders arrested Jesus. Now they want to put Jesus to death, but they cannot because they lack any true governing power. To execute Jesus, the Pharisees just need to get the Roman prefect to say this execution was just. John 19:4 says, ***"Pilate went out again and said to them, 'See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.'"*** After meeting and questioning Jesus, Pilate was not able to find any fault in Jesus of Nazareth. It amazes me that Pilate was able to look at this Jewish man and see no guilt in Him. Pilate was a Roman leader who was doing his best to keep Jerusalem under control so he would not lose his job and life for failing the Roman Empire. To me, the easiest thing Pilate could have done in this situation would be to do what we all try to do, find a fault when one is not there. Amazingly, Pilate could not find anything to say showing Jesus was guilty.

Any Christ follower will agree with you that Jesus is God. He was sinless, perfect, and without any worldly blemish. Knowing that Jesus is the only

person who we can say is perfect is such a peaceful feeling. Knowing that all of God's ways are perfect, sinless, loving, merciful, and just should be at the central hub of our faith. Then why is it that when our situations in life are not where they should be, one of the first people we want to find fault in is God? Pilate examined Jesus for a substantial amount of time and found no fault in Him, and he was not even aware that Jesus was, in fact, the Christ, the world's Savior, the King of kings. We are aware of all those things, and yet we still think God is unfair when there is turmoil in our families, a tragedy strikes, or when finances are not as bountiful as we were hoping. If we know that Jesus is, in fact, perfect and sinless, then His plan for our lives must be the same. Too often I hear people who think that difficult situations in life mean that God is not real, perfect, or just. Instead of looking for the problem in the One who is in control, look at how you can change your perspective. God is perfect and sinless. His plan is perfect. Take a page out of a Roman's life, view God as without guilt, without fault, and perfect in all He does.

1 PETER 1:18-19

PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI

The 21st century has had its fair share of amazing technological developments. I would argue that there are none greater than grocery delivery apps. One minute, you are on the couch, filling up your grocery cart on your smartphone, and in the next couple of hours, it is waiting for you at your doorstep. We utilize this often (maybe too much), but it does not come without occasional issues. I will never forget the time they delivered groceries to my parents' house and said that they "put them by the back door." Well, they were nowhere to be found. We assumed they accidentally sent them to our neighbor's house, but they were not there either. After searching for a while, we finally had to have them redeliver the same order. After about a month, we started smelling this horrible stench in the garage. There, in the back corner of the garage, behind bikes and boxes, we found our groceries. At this point, everything was spoiled, with spots and blemishes covering every part of the food. Needless to say, it was no longer acceptable for our family to eat.

In 1 Peter 1:18-19, we are reminded ***"that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."***

Here, we see Jesus Christ Himself described as ***"a lamb without blemish or spot."*** One of the foundational truths of Christianity is that Jesus was sinless. This truth is also professed throughout the Scripture we see in this devotion and in verses like Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22, Hebrews 7:26, 1 John 3:5, and so many more. He lived for thirty-three years on this Earth, tempted as we all are, yet He never sinned. We are all like those groceries sitting in the back of the garage, spoiled with spots and blemishes. We are not acceptable to be in the presence of God. We were born into sin, and

have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We all deserve the punishment for our sins. However, Jesus stepped in, as the spotless lamb, to make right our relationship with God by removing the debt that we owed, paying for it Himself. In 1 Peter, we see that we could not be ransomed by things like silver or gold; earthly things would not be able to pay for the debt that we owed. It would take a perfect sacrifice, and Jesus provided Himself for us.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** We see again that Jesus knew no sin, yet He took our sins upon Himself on the cross. The result of this beautiful substitution is that, as believers, God can now look upon us and see us as righteous instead of seeing our sins. Jesus was not just a man; Jesus was and is God. Jesus was not just a good man; He lived a sinless life. God with us here on Earth lived a perfect life. His perfection as the Lamb without spot or blemish made it possible for Him to be the sacrifice to ransom us from our futile ways. We stand firm in our belief that Jesus Christ was without sin; this truth is what makes His sacrifice so effective and meaningful for the Church throughout the world.

1 PETER 2:22

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

Jesus was a lamb without spot, a perfect sacrifice. In the book of Exodus, you find the children of Israel enslaved by the Egyptians. They were in a place and an experience that God had never designed for His people. Ultimately, God planned to get His people to turn back to Him, trust Him, and He would lead them to the Promised Land. The Bible tells us in Exodus 1 that He heard the cries of His people.

God used a man named Moses to lead His people back to Him. Now it would not be an easy or uneventful Exodus because the Egyptians needed the Israelites. God told Moses to go in front of Pharaoh and tell him he would inflict ten plagues on the land. It included removing their water source, bugs, and boils, to fiery hail and darkness. God was trying to get their attention. However, it was not until the tenth and final plague that Pharaoh released the Israelites. The tenth plague was called the Passover. God instructed Moses in Exodus chapter 12, that an angel would come over the land and kill the firstborn of every family. The only way the angel would pass over a home is if the blood of a lamb or goat was spread across the doorway of the home. The Bible describes the lamb needed in Exodus 12:5, ***"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats."***

Why would the lamb need to be without blemish? One opinion is that God deserves and requires our best and if we decide we do not want to give Him our best, we are relying on our self. Another concept is summarized in a quote by Gerald Bray, "If the lamb were less than perfect, someone might say it was being sacrificed because of its defects, but that is not true. It was not the lamb that was the problem but for those whom the lamb was dying."

We see the need for a lamb's blood for protection for the Israelites during the Passover and is a perfect picture for our lives. The Perfect Lamb (Jesus) was slain, and His blood was the covering of our sin. It is not on our merit or status that we are saved, but by the blood of the Perfect Lamb. The lamb was not the problem and would not be needed except for what is said in Hebrews 9:22, ***"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."*** Jesus was the perfect sacrifice needed to cover our faults and failures, and He willingly stepped in on our behalf. 1 Peter 2:22 says, ***"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."***

1 JOHN 3:5

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

When I was in the eleventh grade, I did something that forever marked my life. It is something I carried around with me every day since. It took place in my sixth-hour class. I accidentally stabbed myself in the arm with a number 2 pencil. It is not like it hurt that bad, but now I have this blemish on my arm that for 20 years is still going strong. It is this little lead dot on my arm (I know it is not actually lead). If you are my age or older there is a good chance that you have one of these blemishes (if you are younger, you may not know what a pencil is).

In 1 John 3:2-6 it says, ***"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him."***

It says that we who hope in Him are purified because He (Jesus) is pure. The word pure means to be "free from contamination," to be free from blemish. Verse five goes on to say that Jesus came to ***"take away sins, and in Him there is no sin."*** The Bible defines sin many different ways: ***"Whosoever is not of faith is sin"*** (Romans 14:23, KJV), ***"The thought of foolishness is sin"*** (Proverbs 24:9, KJV), ***"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin"*** (James 4:17, KJV), ***"All unrighteousness is sin"*** (1 John 5:17, KJV), and the ***"practice of sinning also practices lawlessness"*** (1 John 3:4).

The Word of God points out our sin. That is precisely what the Law of the Old Testament was to do. It was to show us all that we all fall short; we are all blemished. Without one who is perfect, we are all lost and condemned. There is only one who has no blemish. He is the one, and the only one, that could set us free from sin. Jesus, my Lord and Savior, is pure without blemish, in Him, there is no contamination. In Him, I have freedom and the forgiveness of sin.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

From the earliest age, I remember having dominoes. Not the pizza (although that sounds pretty good right now), but the game. I must confess, that in all the years I have had a dominoes set, though they got a lot of use, I have never actually played the game of dominoes. How did I use them? Do you already know? That is right; I spent hours carefully standing them up into lines, circles, and paths only to knock the first one over and watch them with expectation as each one fell one after another. Did you know there are domino toppling competitions? It is a thing, and it is mesmerizing to watch. Teams of people spend days (sometimes weeks) carefully setting every domino at just the right distance and angle from each other, so that when the first domino is knocked over each of the thousands of succeeding dominoes fall as expected. The current world record is almost 4.5 million dominoes. Incredible! The "domino effect" is a phrase that was coined from this phenomenon and it describes a chain reaction between objects or ideas. Doctrine is like dominoes. One truth builds on another. If you knock one over it causes a chain reaction down the line as it were. It has become popular of late for "Christian" leaders/writers to question and dismiss clear and established doctrine. Among those beliefs has been the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

When we say, "the Virgin Birth" we are talking about the birth of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus was not conceived through the physical union of a man and a woman. We are told instead, that God "overshadowed" the woman, meaning that He "placed" His Son, the Savior of the world, into the womb of the yet unmarried virgin named Mary. Jesus was conceived by God and born of the woman. This is what the Bible (God) says happened.

Now, this is an essential doctrinal "domino." Why? Because, if Jesus had been conceived through "human means," He could have only ever been that, human. He would have been no more than we are. But He is infinitely more than just a human being. He is both man and God at the same time. As the Puritans said it, "He is all of man and all of very God" meaning that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God at the same time. You say, "Wait, is that not 200%?" Yes, that is why I said He is more!

You see because Jesus was born both of the woman and of God, He stands alone in all of history. He is the "God-Man." As such, He stands in the middle, between both God and man. He is, as the Scriptures say, ***"the Mediator between God and men"*** (1 Timothy 2:5, NKJV). He alone holds this place because He alone is both God and man at the same time.

Now, if you knock that domino over, and deny His Virgin Birth, then a chain reaction occurs and other dominoes fall. To deny He was virgin born (domino #1) means that He is not God (domino #2) and thus could not be sinless (domino #3). That means that He cannot die as the "sinless substitute" for our sins (domino #4) which then means that we are still in our sins and unsaved (domino #5). Ultimately, Christianity is a false hope (the last domino to fall).

However, if He really was conceived of God and born of the virgin, then He is both God and man and 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV) is a shout of victory: ***"For He*** (the Father) ***made Him*** (Jesus) ***who knew no sin*** (He was sinless, innocent) ***to be sin for us*** (He took our sins on Himself), ***that we might become the righteousness of God*** (innocent) ***in Him."*** The sinless One, the innocent One, our Savior, the Lord Jesus, did not need to die for His sins, He had none (domino #1). He took our sin on Himself (domino #2) and died in our place (domino #3) so that we could become innocent through Him (domino #4) and thus we are truly saved. What sweet dominoes fall as we trust the truth of what God has said.

HEBREWS 4:15

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15

What a wonderful joy it is to know that in our temptations we are not alone! In both the Gospel of Matthew and Luke, we see Jesus face a barrage of temptations from the enemy. Satan attacks Jesus with three distinct evil schemes (1 John 2:16 calls them, ***"The desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life."***) and each time the Lord repels the volleys of the Devil. What is crucial to understand is that Jesus faced each type of temptation that we will ever face, demonstrating for us how to defeat temptation. An important promise that God has made to us concerning temptation is found in 1Corinthians 10:13. The Scripture reads, ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*** Jesus not only gives us the battle plans for overcoming temptation, but empowers us, through the Holy Spirit, to endure the fiery trials of temptation.

Another profound principle we learn from the temptation of Christ is that to be tempted is not sin. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Mathew 4:1), but He remained ***"without sin."*** When we face temptation or our flesh (see Galatians 5:16-25) desires something evil, the devil will use guilt to make us feel defeated, but we must realize to face temptation is not sin. We must endure and look urgently for the way of escape that God has promised to provide. The promised escape hatch is there. Find it. Take it! Know that Jesus sympathizes with our human weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15), He has paved the way for escape, and

empowers us to take the way of escape. Sometimes fleeing temptation (2 Timothy 2:22) will be mental, sometimes that means physically leaving where you are, changing media habits, or altering your driving patterns.

Whatever temptation tactic Satan attacks you with, know that Jesus faces that temptation with you!

6

JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



Jon Gordon wrote a fascinating book, *"No Complaining Rule: Positive Ways to Deal with Negativity."* The main premise of the book is that people should come with solutions, not just problems. Too often people feel they have the "gift of criticism" and they take no responsibility in resolving the issue. Gordon noted that this negativity was slowly killing organizations. He demanded that when people see a problem, they go one step further than just reporting it (or whining); he proposed they find a way to make it right or at least better.

1. How do you deal with negativity?

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2. Who are a few of the most encouraging people you know?

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Finding a solution for the problem is heroic.

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. In the third chapter of the Bible, we have a huge problem. The problem is that man sinned against God and broke the relationship with Him. This was a major dilemma. There was nothing man could do. God realized there was nothing man could do. So, in the same chapter, God presents a solution. God made a plan. He had the "fix" for the broken relationship. It was the death of Jesus.

First, it is important to realize from Scripture that man has a problem. The problem is called sin.

3. Why is sin a problem?

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THE PROBLEM: SIN

David sinned in many ways. He was lazy, irresponsible, lustful, an adulterous, and even a murderer. He wrote Psalm chapter 32 and chapter 51 expressing his godly remorse. Psalm 51:5 says, ***"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."*** David not only sinned as an adult, he realized that his problem and our problem is much bigger than that; we were born sinners.

4. What does it mean that we are born with a sin nature?

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5. What "sins" do you see in little children that were not "taught" to them?

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Romans 3:10-12 says, ***"As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."***

6. How many times do these verses express our problem?

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Romans 3:23 continues the desperate need for help, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."***

7. What does it mean to ***"fall short of the glory of God?"***

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Jeremiah 17:9 paints an interesting picture, ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"***

8. Is it good to just "follow your heart"?

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Galatians 5:17 says, ***"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."***

9. What is meant by ***"the flesh"*** and ***"the Spirit"***?

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_____
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Ecclesiastes 7:20 adds, ***"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."***

10. How many different books of the Bible listed here show our problem?

_____
_____
_____

Sin was and is our problem. The solution was and is that Jesus died for our sins.

D.A. Carson said, "It was not nails that held Jesus to that wretched cross; it was his unqualified resolution, out of love for his Father, to do his Father's will—and it was his love for sinners like me."

THE SOLUTION: JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS

C. S. Lewis said, "It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things; but to convert rebellious wills cost Him crucifixion." God created

everything out of nothing with just a spoken word. However, to correct a problem, cost Him everything.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:3, ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."***

11. What is meant by ***"of first importance"***?

_____
_____
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"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." 1 Peter 3:18

12. According to this verse, why did Jesus suffer?

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_____

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Verse 8 adds, ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** Romans 5:6

13. What was our state when Jesus died for us?

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14. How good do we have to become before accepting the grace of God?

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"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

15. What does the word ***"ransom"*** mean and how does that relate to the topic?

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16. According to this verse, why did Jesus come to earth?

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_____

"God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.'" Billy Graham

NOTES

ROMANS 3:10-12

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Why do bad things happen to good people?

In August of 2015, a family member's life was taken. He got himself caught up in a really bad situation, and another person took my cousin's life. This was hard for my family and me. For a period, I became close to him. During his funeral the "pastor" overseeing the funeral started with "sometimes bad things, tragic things happen to good people." The moment this man said that a cold chill went through my soul. The majority of the people in this funeral were non-believers. I listened as a "man of God" got up and told an entire room that my cousin was a "good" person only to use Psalm chapter 23 as a reference point.

I understand that comforting and mourning with those who are hurting is one of the primary responsibilities of a Pastor. The other major responsibility is speaking the truth. We live in such a hard, cold, cynical culture, but our culture also is terrified to offend people. Now I am not speaking ill of my cousin, but he was not a good person. I am not a good person. You reading this, you are not a good person. Every human who is alive is not a good person. We all have sinned. We all have this inherited inward disposition to rebel against our God. Hearing a person say "bad things happen to good people" out of the mouth of a man who is meant to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ was nothing more than hurting the people who were listening.

In the book of Romans chapter 3, Paul puts every Jewish Christian and every Gentile Christian reader in the same box. Paul places every person into "the box of sin." Romans 3:10-12 says, ***"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good,***

not even one." We have already covered that God's Word is perfect and absolute earlier in this Majors Series. To have the Bible say that no one is righteous, no one seeks God, all have turned aside, and no one does good is an absolute truth. The only person to be born of a woman who was born good was Jesus, for the rest of us, we fall into the fourteen indictments that Paul places on all of humanity in the book of Romans. The grim, cold truth is there is no such thing as a good person except for Jesus.

Man's sinfulness is plainly seen in any act of abuse, violence, neglect, envy, and anger. Those are easy for us to recognize. It is when we start to create our sense of what is "good" is when we get into trouble. The moment we stop using God's way as the measuring stick to what is good or bad, we are in trouble. In God's eye, glancing at a woman in lust is adultery. Being angry because someone cut you off in traffic is the same as you purposely, mercilessly murdering him or her. Many look for an answer to the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" My response is generally, "Show me a good person." This thought is not meant to be depressing; it should be uplifting knowing we are all on the same playing field in God's creation. No matter how "not good" we are, He still loves us, and loved us so much He sent His son to die for us.

ROMANS 3:23

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

When I was in high school, I attended a small Christian school. Whatever comes to your mind when you think of a small school, think smaller. I graduated with thirteen total students in my class! I played sports throughout middle and high school. I was decent at baseball and basketball, usually one of the better players on the team. Our competition was other local Christian schools. While our teams were always terrible (throughout my four years of varsity basketball, we won a total of six games), I thought I was a decent player. In my senior year, my basketball coach encouraged me to try out for my Bible college team the following year. I went back and forth on the idea for a couple of months, but ultimately decided against it in favor of getting a part-time job during my freshman year of college. Boy, did I make the right decision. I vividly remember the first time I went to see my college's team play. The pace they ran with, their ability to make difficult shots, and their quickness were like nothing I had seen before. Their worst player was lightyears better than me. The problem was that the level of competition I compared myself to in high school wasn't very strong—but at the time, it was all I knew.

Similarly, the standard that most people measure themselves against regarding how good a person they are and if they should be allowed in Heaven is other people around them. When, in reality, the standard that God measures humans against is His own perfect holiness. It is perfection. That is the standard to be allowed in Heaven. Romans 3:22-25 puts it clearly, ***"For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."*** No one is good enough. No one measures up. All have fallen short of God's standard.

Other than the book of Revelation, Romans speaks of the wrath of God more than any other New Testament book of the Bible. Twelve times throughout the book, Paul explicitly mentions the wrath of God. Romans 1:18 says, ***"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."*** While God's wrath is a sobering reality, because of Christ, believers do not have to fear it. Someone has to pay the price for each of our sins. Therefore, Christ, though He lived a perfect life, willfully died for the sins of all through a gruesome death on the cross.

Take a few minutes today to thank God for sending His Son, Jesus, to die the death that we deserved for our sins, and for making a way for us to be brought into His Kingdom.

COLOSSIANS 2:13-14

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

What is a sin? Have you sinned before? These are the questions that I often ask when speaking to children in regards to salvation. This question must be answered for us to move on in regards to salvation. Colossians 2:13 says, ***"And you, who were dead in your trespasses."*** The word trespasses can also be translated as sin. It is a pretty straightforward statement - because of sin, we are dead.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the country of Israel. While we were there, we made a stop at the Dead Sea. Driving along the sea was amazing. The blue water with the mountains reflecting off the water is breathtaking. As you get closer, you realize why they call it the Dead Sea. There is no life in and around the Dead Sea. It is just desert, sand, salt, and rocks. It is hard for me to imagine this huge body of water having zero life in it - no fish, no plants, nothing. It is pretty, but it is dead.

This is the picture of our lives without Jesus. We can have a pretty outside, but without the saving grace of Jesus, we are dead. I am so happy that verse 13 does not stop there. The rest of this passage goes on to say, ***"God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."***

If you grew up in church, and especially in a youth group, you most likely had a service where you nailed a piece of paper to a cross. Usually, what happens is the speaker at the end of his lesson tells the students that they can take their piece of paper and write any sins on the paper. Then they are invited to come up to a cross and nail that paper to it. That symbolic event comes from this passage of Scripture. It is the picture of what Jesus does for us on the cross. The debt of sin that all of us carry can

only be forgiven when they are taken to the cross. Jesus came so our sins could be forgiven. We no longer live in death when we confess Him as Lord and Savior, but in life and eternity.

GALATIANS 5:17

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

We all remember growing up and watching cartoons. Some of us still enjoy watching them. Remember the cartoon character that comes across a situation where he must decide to do right or wrong? The cartoon then showed us a memorable picture. At that moment, an angel appeared on his right shoulder and began to "influence" him to do right. Then out of nowhere, a devil appeared on the other shoulder with a deep raspy voice and attempted to convince the character to do wrong. The cartoonist painted a picture with visuals, but also characteristics. The characteristics of the good angel showed him wearing white, put together in appearance, and with a very soft weak voice. The devil, on the other hand, was the exact opposite of the "good" angel. He had horns and wore a red cape, yielded a pitchfork, and had a strong, deep voice. These two characters would argue and battle back and forth for the next few minutes, attempting to convince the cartoon character to go to their side and do what they wanted. This battle, although funny in a cartoon, is a great picture of the innermost beings of every follower of Christ.

Of course, we do not have two little cartoons that appear on our shoulders every time we need to make a decision, but we have two innate sides that fight for influence in our life every single day. The Bible calls them Spirit (good) and Flesh (bad). When we are born into the world, we are born into the flesh. Because of Adam's sin, we are all now born into sin. Romans 3:23 tells us, ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** You see, God created man perfect, but in our failure, we brought the flesh into our lives. Through the cross and blood of Jesus, we gain access to the Spirit. It is only when we repent of our sins and call upon the name of the Lord to be our Savior, that we receive the Spirit in our lives. However, we still battle the flesh. How do we balance the two? Galatians 5:17 tells us, ***"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of***

the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." Although we laugh at the picture drawn in the cartoons, it is a real battle that rages every day inside us. The key to fighting the battle between flesh and spirit is paying attention to which side we are feeding.

We can feed the spirit by reading God's Word. His Word is our daily bread; it is nourishment to our souls. We need to be constantly growing in His Word to feed the Spirit. We need to spend time with God in prayer, constantly seeking His direction in our lives. The Bible is a perfect blueprint for living in the Spirit. I love the acronym for the Bible, "Believers Instruction Before Leaving Earth." The more we feed the Spirit in our lives, the more it grows and influences our decisions. However, the same goes for the flesh. The more we feed the flesh, the bigger it gets and the more it influences our decisions. We feed the flesh by ignoring the Bible and its teachings and doing whatever is contrary to what God says.

As a believer, we have to understand this battle wages inside us, because if you do not realize it, you could be feeding the flesh and block out the spirit in your life. The Apostle Paul warns his listeners in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-19 not to ***"quench the Spirit."*** Man is that a scary thought! I cringe at the thought of blocking out or quenching God's direction in my life.

Which are you feeding more? What changes do you need to make to start feeding the Spirit? Have you been feeding the flesh for so long that it has grown so large you cannot even hear the Spirit? Today is the day to seek God's will and direction in your life and begin feeding the Spirit. You and I need to get to it!

JEREMIAH 17:9

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Have you ever given or been advised to "just follow your heart"? Have you heard the encouragement that "you cannot go wrong if you just listen to your heart"? According to the Bible, that might not be the best idea. While many may believe and teach that the heart is an infallible guide, God says quite the opposite. Listen to His words about the heart.

In Jeremiah 17:9, God says that the human heart (another word for the inward life of a person) ***"is deceitful."*** The word ***"deceitful"*** there means that it is tricky, not sure-footed, and polluted. Wow! That is pretty strong language God uses to describe what so many others describe in flowery terms. God does not stop there. He says that the human heart is not only ***"deceitful"*** but that it is "trickery" or it can fool us ***"above all things."*** Wait a minute, is God telling us that our heart is more deceitful than anything else in life? Yep! How can this be? Think about it; your heart is inside you. Your "heart" describes your inward life. All your thoughts, emotions, and being are all summed up in the word "heart." When you consider that, then it makes sense why the "heart" has this ability to so effectively trick us. God says something else, something shocking about the human heart. He says that it is ***"desperately sick."*** These words mean "incurably sick." He then says, ***"who can understand it?"*** This means that even we cannot know our own heart completely.

All of this leads to a couple of conclusions.

The heart is not a trustworthy guide. Right? I mean, if God says it is incurably sick, cannot be known, and tricks us more than anything else

does, there can only be one conclusion. It is not a reliable guide. This means that the way we feel about something cannot be our guide for what is true and what is not. It also cannot be the compass we use for navigating the rough waters of life.

Man is a sinner. If the "heart" is the word used to describe the entire inward life of a person. Then it describes us. It describes us at our "core." In short, to say the heart is like this is to say that we are like this (apart from Christ). Consider what God is saying, "The entire inward life of a person (all their thoughts, affections, emotions and will) apart from Me, are deceiving them above all things. They are incurably sick, and they do not even know it." Yikes!

It is because of this that Jesus came to die. When you consider what God says about the human heart, one thing becomes clear; man was not ever going to fix himself. Man was not ever going to dig himself out of his sinful state. Man was not going to figure it out. We were not getting better throughout the ages with all of our "advancements," we were only getting worse. So, God came to rescue us. Because we could not rescue ourselves, ***"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"*** (1 Corinthians 15:3). It is only as the Holy Spirit of God convicts a person of their total sinful condition and convinces them of the truth of the Gospel and Jesus' ability to save, that a person can become a new creation in Christ Jesus and sing, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound to save a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I am found, was blind but now I see."

ECCLESIASTES 7:20

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." Ecclesiastes 7:20

If you have ever shared the Gospel or engaged in a spiritual conversation before, one of the most common discussions will center around how we get to Heaven and who gets to go to Heaven. Several years ago, I was given a counseling referral to meet with a mother and her daughters. The mother was a professing Christian whose daughters were extremely skeptical and, honestly, somewhat hostile towards Christianity. The mother's goal, unbeknownst to me when we began, was for me, the pastor, to convince the daughters of, not only the validity of Christianity but the very existence of God. It was no small order! What transpired in my office over the next hour, was one of the most disturbing meetings I have ever experienced. Frankly, I have been haunted by it ever since. I began by asking some questions, attempting to grasp the worldview that these young ladies and their mother held. I quickly realized that I was dealing with an extremely humanistic viewpoint. I talked about creation, the historical evidence of the existence and ministry of Jesus, and the validity of the Bible as we know it. Up to this point, the Mom was completely on my side. But I knew at the core, what was needed was a faithful presentation of the Gospel and, Lord willing, the conversion of these students.

As I began to turn the conversation from several extremely hot-button cultural issues to the Gospel, I could not have anticipated what would happen. Every faithful presentation of the Gospel begins with a fundamental understanding that we are sinners and in need of a savior. Romans 3:11, 23 says, ***"None is righteous, no, not one…all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** There are no exceptions. Everyone ever born has sinned against God and needs to be saved from their sin. As I shared

Romans 3, not only were these two girls disgusted at the proclamation from Scripture that everyone not only sins, but is innately sinful, but their mother began to adamantly disagree that everyone sins and cannot save themselves. That is where this meeting came to a screeching halt.

Unless someone realizes their absolute helplessness in the light of sin and that condition encompasses the whole of mankind, there is simply no way to go forward with the Gospel. You cannot get to the Good News until there is an acceptance of the bad news. As that meeting came to an end, my heart broke. Not only were these two young, intelligent girls lost in sin, but their mother did not understand the true Gospel either.

The total sinful depravity of man is a fundamental truth of Christianity. We are, as the Bible says, ***"dead in the trespasses and sins"*** (Ephesians 2:1). We are not kind of dead. We are not on spiritual life support. We are utterly and hopelessly lost in sin. We are slaves to sin. But Jesus came. He died for our sins. He did not just come and die to be a personal improvement program or establish a superior religious movement. Jesus was the only means of salvation. His atoning work on the cross of Calvary is the only means of salvation and freedom from our sin.

7

RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



“I checked the tomb of Buddha, and it was occupied, and I checked the tomb of Confucius and it was occupied, and I checked the tomb of Mohammed and it was occupied, and I came to the tomb of Jesus and it was empty. And I said, There is one who conquered death.” John MacArthur

Jesus is alive!

Charles Colson said, “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

Jesus is alive!

The death and burial of Jesus are recorded in John chapter 19. His resurrection does not occur until John 20. However, John 11:25-26 records, ***“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”***

1. Looking at these verses, what did Jesus call Himself?

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2. Looking at the verses, what does that name mean?

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Mark 16:1-6 records what happened the morning of the resurrection, ***“When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint***

him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?' And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.'"

3. What was going to be the difficulty for the woman?

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4. Who speaks to the women?

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5. What is said to the women?

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Luke 24:5-7 says, ***"And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.'"***

6. What question is asked of the women?

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7. What did Jesus prophesy?

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1 Thessalonians 4:14 takes the resurrection to another level, ***"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."***

8. What does the resurrection mean to believers?

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Acts 1:3 gives an interesting fact, ***"He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."***

9. How long was Jesus on earth before He went back to Heaven?

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Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, ***"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 Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."***

10. How does Paul describe the Gospel?

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11. How many people did Jesus appear to after the resurrection?

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There were so many witnesses. Norman Geisler said, "If the Resurrection had not occurred, why would the apostle Paul give such a list of supposed eyewitnesses? He would immediately lose all credibility with his Corinthian readers by lying so blatantly."

John 20:24-29 records the story of Thomas after Jesus' resurrection. Verses 24-25 say, ***"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.'"***

12. Why is Thomas sometimes called "Doubting Thomas"?

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Verses 26-29 continue the story, ***"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"***

13. Was Jesus physically present or as a spirit?

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14. What does Thomas' response mean?

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Josh McDowell said, "No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the Resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good."

15. How does this perspective comfort believers?

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Martin Luther added, "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."

16. How is this a good visual?

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Acts 1:8-11 speaks of Jesus ascension back to Heaven, ***"'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"***

17. Who were the two men in white robes?

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18. What do the two men say?

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19. Where is Jesus now?

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20. What does it mean that He ***"will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven"***?

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"Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone to a worldview that provides the perspective to all of life." Josh McDowell

NOTES

1 THESSALONIANS 4:14

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Jesus was there at creation. Jesus looked upon humanity after sin came into the world. Jesus watched as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived out their covenants. Jesus watched as Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Jesus watched as David defeated Goliath. Jesus watched as Solomon made Israel the strongest nation in the world. Jesus watched as Babylon and Assyria sacked Judah and Israel. Jesus watched as the remnant came back to rebuild their kingdom. Jesus watched all those moments in history happen until the day He came to be born. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus fulfilled God's will. Jesus paid the price that we could not pay ourselves. All of that is worthy of what an amazing God has done for us, but the crown jewel of all of the acts of Jesus is that He rose again.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 says, ***"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again."*** It is a factual statement. It is as factual to say that Jesus rose from the dead as it is to say that water is wet. There has never been any historical document that has ever disproved the fact that Jesus rose from the grave. There has never been a movement against Christ that has ever buried, derailed, or slowed down the amazing truth that Jesus rose again. There has never been a king, dictator, ideology, or philosophy that has been able to rule over the fact that Jesus rose from the grave. The truest statement that we can say is that Jesus did, in fact, die and He did, in fact, rise from the grave.

We live in a society that only likes to reason in the physical realm. We no longer believe history as fact but as a narrative to those who win. We live in a world where on July 21, 1969, everyone woke up and everyone was in awe of the fact that on the previous day man just landed on the moon. Fast-forward thirty years and people now believe that it was a hoax. We live in a world where despite the fact there has never been any document

that disproved Jesus' resurrection, 2000 years after this amazing event people believe it was just a story for the weak-minded. Every Christian should know and preach every day that "He has risen!"

We as Christ followers must make sure that the resurrection is at the cornerstone of our relationship. We are meant to live our lives in constant identification to the fact that our Savior rose again. The significance of the resurrection from death to life is shown in our lives of dying to our former self and rising to newness of life. Take a moment today and figure out how you show the world that you have the power of the resurrection living inside of you.

MARK 16:1-6

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

I was watching a podcast recently that had a couple of actors who were discussing faith and religion. Two of them claimed they used to be Christian and are now identifying as Agnostic. The host of the show was asking them why they had moved away from the Christian faith. One of the main reasons they said they no longer believed in Jesus Christ was because they felt the claim that Jesus physically resurrected was not true. They said that because this claim is central to the Christian faith, they could no longer follow it because they did not believe it. The host went on to say that he did not think the resurrection was one of the central themes, but rather, things like Jesus telling us to love our neighbor were central to Christianity. As I listened to this podcast, I could not disagree more. In Mark 16:6, we read an account of the resurrection that is absolutely incredible. The author of Mark writes that the women approached the tomb when they saw an angel in a white robe sitting by the tomb. He said, ***"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."*** I love those four words that the angel says after He is risen, ***"He is not here."***

The reason I love those words is that they are not only for the women who went to the tomb on that early morning. They are words for everyone who, since then, begins a quest seeking the truth of Jesus of Nazareth. Regardless of your background, IQ, status, gender, or age, if you begin this amazing journey of finding out who this man is, then you will see all roads lead to the cross and the empty tomb. Whatever else you believe about the Bible, God, or Christianity, it all depends on what is in that tomb 2000 years later. Paul, when speaking about the importance of the physical resurrection to our faith, in 1 Corinthians 15:14, wrote, ***"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."*** He is saying that your belief and everything you hang your life

on is worthless and cannot save you. Paul even goes on to say that if Christ has not been raised, then we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19)! The resurrection is of first importance. Whether you are just starting this journey to find out the truth about Jesus of Nazareth or you have been walking with God for a while, the truth remains the same as it was all those years ago, recorded in Mark 16:6, ***"He has risen; He is not here."***

LUKE 24:5-7

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

Is it all a scam? Did Jesus die and rise from the dead? This question and its implications are vital for us to consider as believers. For without a literal raising from the dead, all of Christianity is in vain. As Paul states in one of his letters to the early church, our faith is "useless" if Jesus did not rise (1 Corinthians 15:14).

There are many skeptics. Some will say it was an illusion organized by His followers. Others say Jesus did not die on the cross, and therefore He never had to rise from the dead (although Mark chapter 15 tells us Pilate carefully made sure He was dead). Some critics say that Jesus did die, but the disciples kidnapped His body (even though Matthew chapter 27 tells us the tomb was guarded by Roman Soldiers). Here are a couple of points I think are very helpful when considering Christ's resurrection.

First, take time to read Luke chapter 24. You will read about a few ladies traveling to Jesus' grave on the first day of the week to finish preparing His body for burial. When the women arrive at the tomb, they find the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. Instead of being excited, they were perplexed and afraid. Immediately, the women left to tell the disciples what they had found. But rather than believing Jesus rose from the dead (as Jesus had claimed He would), the disciples themselves believed the women to be lying. It was not until later when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room that they finally believed.

Luke 24:10-11 says, ***"Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."***

Next, the Bible teaches that Jesus spent 40 days on Earth after His resurrection. Acts chapter 1 gives an account of the final interaction between Jesus and His disciples before He ascends to Heaven. Jesus gives the disciples instructions on how to live after He is gone. After the ascension, Scripture reveals the determination and passion of the disciples to live out the call given by Jesus. But the disciples were met with much opposition. In Acts 12:1-3, we read, ***"Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."*** In this passage, we learn that James, the brother of John (the disciple) was killed for his belief in Christ. Other accounts reveal many were beaten and killed because of their faith in Christ and the resurrection.

Therefore, knowing the disciples were under severe persecution and even martyred for their faith in Christ, there is another question I must ask myself regarding the disciples and the resurrection of Jesus, "Why would the disciples be willing to die for their faith in Jesus if it was just a hoax and He did not really rise from the dead?" In other words, why would the disciples put their lives on the line for something they knew to be a lie? It does not make sense.

Rather, the accounts of the disciples provide compelling evidence that Jesus did rise from the grave, appeared to the disciples, and inspired the disciples to give their lives so that many would come to know Jesus as Messiah.

Personally, you must also consider the questions, "Did Jesus rise?" and "Why would the disciples give their lives for the Christ?" If you believe He rose from the dead, then Jesus is God; and if He is God, He deserves all of our worship and praise. How will you live out your life to glorify and praise Him as our resurrected Messiah?

JOHN 20:24-29

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

I am an avid sports fan, okay, sometimes in an unhealthy way, I will watch or play anything. I recently had the opportunity to travel to Israel for a Holy Land experience. One night at the hotel, I found myself watching a game called snooker. It is a version of billiards with some very interesting rules. I googled the rules so I could follow along in the match. Yes, I am that guy. I love the art of competition and sport; it is enthralling.

On November 20, 1982, the world experienced one of the greatest plays in the history of sports. It was a college football game between the California Bears and Stanford Cardinals. They were and are still rivals, with each matchup being highly anticipated. The game went back and forth with both teams holding leads in the game. John Elway, the quarterback for Stanford, found himself down two points late in the fourth quarter. He was able to lead his team down the field for a field goal with four seconds left to take the lead and seemingly capture the most important win. The team celebrated because they had just taken down their rival. They poured the Gatorade jug over the head coach and celebrated this incredible victory. However, by rule, there were four seconds left on the clock, and they must kick the ball off to the other team. The announcer, Joe Starkey said, “Only a miracle can save the Bears now!” If you know the situation, you know what happened next. The term “The Play” was coined because the Cal Bears would take the kickoff back for a touchdown. It is one of the craziest plays you will ever see (trust me, if you have not seen it go check it out on YouTube) that included five laterals. The Stanford players, coaches, and even the band came on the field thinking they had won. The California Bears walked away victorious against their greatest rival in one of the biggest turn of events in sports’ history.

This story reminds me of another turn of events in the history of the world, and Cal’s win does not come close to touching it in the level of importance.

I am referencing the resurrection and victory of our Savior Jesus Christ. After Jesus died on the cross and paid the debt we owed with His own life; He was put into a tomb. It was a tomb where everyone thought He would stay; His followers even came to put oils and spices on His body. There was no hope; death had won. Jesus' greatest rival, Satan, began to celebrate his victory. I can just imagine, Satan and his followers celebrating because they had finally defeated Jesus. He was dead, and the story was over. Oh wait, the game was not over. The tomb could not hold Jesus. Death had no victory because Jesus Christ conquered Death, Hell, and the Grave and walked out victorious. When no one else thought there was hope, and the "announcers" said only a miracle can save Him now, that in fact was exactly what happened. It was the greatest comeback in the history of the world, and one I am thankful for every minute of every day.

I mentioned that Jesus' followers had even given up on Him. It is just like the game between Stanford and Cal. When Stanford seemingly captured the victory in the closing seconds, most fans of Cal began to head home. They "knew" the game was over and there was no hope. The same happened to Jesus' followers. Many went home dejected and disappointed knowing they had lost. In the days following Jesus' victory, He would appear to His followers and show them His victory; they were amazed and astonished. One follower, named Thomas was still in disbelief. He saw with his own eyes Satan's victory and headed home.

In John 20:24-29 we pick up in the story. ***"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.' Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"*** Thomas needed to see

the victory with His own eyes, and Jesus showed up. The victory Jesus earned is given to us. So may you today truly understand the greatest victory in the history of the world, Jesus Christ!

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NKJV)

What if Jesus had never risen from the dead? What I mean is, what if He had come, taught us all that He taught us, showed us all He showed us, even died on the cross, was buried in the tomb, but that was it? What if that was where the story ended? What I am asking is, what if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Would it change anything? Could we just go on as we always have? Does anything change?

We do not need to guess about this. First Corinthians chapter 15, tells us exactly what it would mean if Jesus did not rise from the dead. It would have been the end of Christianity. It is not an exaggeration to say that Christianity would have been over before it even began! Jesus would have faded into the background of history as any other good man or teacher, and we would not be having this conversation. In short, it would mean that we are not saved, that our sins are not forgiven, and that we have no hope at all!

The denial of the resurrection is nothing new. Following the resurrection, many tried to explain it away or dismiss it altogether. Some suggested that Jesus never actually even died, that He revived (and somehow in His weakened state rolled back a 2-ton stone by Himself and all of His

disciples died knowing He was lying). Some suggested that He died, but never actually rose from the dead at all, that the disciples came in the night and stole His body (overpowering the Roman guards and again, each of them dying knowing that the whole thing was a farce). One of the heresies (false doctrine) that was being spread by false teachers in the days of the early church was the idea that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead physically. These heretics taught that when Christ rose from the dead, He only did so "spiritually." Most of them also said that He only came "spiritually" teaching that He left no footprints when He walked. The apostle's (especially Paul) continually fought against these false teachers and their false doctrine.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul dealt with the bodily resurrection of Christ. He said that Jesus Christ not only died and was buried (you can not bury a spirit!) but He also rose from the dead the third day. He said this was all according to the promise of the Scriptures. He does not stop there. What he says next is so important. He says Jesus was seen alive by Peter (Cephas), then by the 12 disciples, and then by over 500 others at one time. Now here is the kicker, Paul says, "They are all still alive! Ask them what they saw! They will tell you." He goes on and says, "He was seen by His brother James, then by all of the apostles and then, I saw Him myself." (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

Now, it is certainly possible to get a few people to go in together on a lie. But how many are willing to die for what they know is a lie? Christians were being persecuted and killed for saying that Christ was alive. How many would be willing to die knowing it was all a lie? Even if over 500 people were in on the lie, how many of them would have maintained that lie while being persecuted, tortured, and killed for that lie? The answer is very few if any. If it were a lie, it would have eventually been exposed as such and Christianity, and indeed Christ, would have faded into the background of history amid scandal as so many others have.

But we do not have that. We have countless eyewitness Christians with their dying breath proclaiming that He is risen! They are convinced they saw Him alive. They had touched Him. They watched Him as He both rose from the dead and ascended 40 days later into Heaven before their eyes.

ACTS 1:3

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"He presented himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." Acts 1:3

As the lives of many historically important military, political, social, and religious leaders come to an end, either by age or in some cases by assassination or other tragedies, society begins to memorialize them, honor them through the building of monuments or museums, or other means of transforming a cultural figure into an icon. Martin Luther King Jr. and both John and Bobby Kennedy were each assassinated at what appeared to be the prime of their lives. Entertainers who have died due to a drug overdose, plane crashes, or car accidents instantly have their last movie or album celebrated as their final work. Military figures who die in battle or win wars have been remembered with statues that can be found all around the world. Even today as I write this, I received the news that Dr. Billy Graham has gone to Heaven at the age of 99. No evangelist or preacher in modern time has had the global impact of Graham. His legacy will live on for decades to come. For many, Jesus of Nazareth falls within this same scope, relegated to simply a brilliant teacher, political figure, and founder of a global religious movement. But one single event sets Jesus apart from everyone else: The Resurrection.

Jesus did not stay dead. He rose again after being dead and buried for three days. This single, historical event creates the lens through which we view every other facet of Jesus' life and ministry. Years after Jesus' resurrection, the Apostle Paul writes, ***"He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep"*** (1 Corinthians 15:6). Jesus' resurrection was attested by 500 people who saw Jesus, not at separate, individual times,

but at once. Jesus rose again and to demonstrate the validity of this, He gave us ***"many proofs"*** (Acts 1:3). After suffering the unspeakable wrath of the cross, dying, and rising again, He would eat with the disciples, talk with friends, travel on the road to Emmaus, teach, allow His wounds to be examined by Thomas, and many more proofs.

The idea of Jesus' bodily resurrection is a fact attested to by hundreds of witnesses and further proved by the fact that many of them would themselves face death by martyrdom for believing, preaching, and professing this reality. The Scripture is clear, ***"in fact Christ has been raised from the dead"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20).

8

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



I like famous movie lines. In studying the return of Christ one key scenario comes to mind. In his 1984 movie, *"Terminator,"* Arnold Schwarzenegger boldly proclaims, "I'll be back." He immediately returned to quite the scene. He kept his word. I view Jesus, with more power than Arnold could ever imagine, saying with words of comfort, but warning, "I will be back!" Jesus is coming back. He will keep His word.

Maybe you are more of a fan of history and remember General Douglas MacArthur. During World War II, he promised the people of the Philippines, "I Shall Return." He did keep his word.

Acts 1 records Jesus leaving for Heaven. Right after He ascends, an angel says, ***"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven"*** (verse 11). As soon as He leaves, we are reminded that He will return.

1. How will the Lord return?

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_____

_____

"Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with promises of the Second Coming of Christ. There are 1,845 references to it in the Old Testament, and a total of seventeen Old Testament books give it prominence. Of the 260 chapters in the entire New Testament, there are 318 references to the Second Coming, or one out of 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event. The four missing books include three which are single-chapter letters written to individual persons on a particular subject, and the fourth is Galatians which does imply Christ's coming again. For every prophecy on the First Coming of Christ, there are 8 on Christ's Second Coming." Paul Lee Tan

2. What points stand out most in this quote?

_____

_____

_____

3. Does this quote surprise you? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says, ***"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."***

4. What does ***"grieve as others do who have no hope"*** mean?

_____

_____

_____

5. What is necessary for one to have hope?

_____

_____

_____

6. Describe what is pictured here.

_____

_____

_____

7. What is the goal of these words?

8. The parables of Jesus Christ often refer to His return. Look up each parable, write down what the parable is, and mention how it relates to the topic.

Matthew 24:44-51:

Matthew 25:1-13:

Matthew 25:14-30:

Luke 12:35-38:

Luke 12:39-40:

Luke 21:25-36:

_____

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In 2 Peter 3:10-12 it says, ***"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!"***

9. Will the Lord's return be well announced or a surprise?

_____

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_____

10. Knowing that the Lord could return at any time, how are we told to live?

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_____

"When He returns is not as important as the fact that we are ready for Him when He does return." A.W. Tozer

11. What does this quote mean?

_____

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The last two verses of the Bible (Revelation 22:20-21) say, ***"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."***

12. What is the very last message of the Bible?

_____

_____

_____

“Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.” C.S. Lewis

Jesus will return. He will be back!

NOTES

MATTHEW 24:44-45

PASTOR RYAN STORY

While working with high school students, I developed a few questions I liked using each year. One of my favorite questions to ask was: “If God came to you and asked, ‘You have a choice. Choice one, I will come back right now, and the rapture will happen. Or choice two, I will wait exactly one year. What do you choose?’” I would enjoy watching students struggle with the implications of this question. Almost every time the majority of students chose choice two. It is not that they do not want to be with Jesus in Heaven, they just always look at their lives and realize that they are not ready. They feel they need to evangelize to loved ones. They feel they need to take another look at their walk with Jesus and make sure they are not on the rough end of Matthew 7:21. As the conversation concluded, I'd always encourage students that their walk with God should show that they are ready for His return at any time.

Matthew 24:44 says, ***“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*** One of the key fundamental facts about our God is that He is, in fact, coming back. Jesus came to this Earth, loved and healed people, gave up His life on a Roman cross in order that we might be made righteous in God’s sight, and returned to the right hand of the Father. He did all of that close to two thousand years ago. There is one major event that has yet to happen, Christ’s return for His bride. The hardest part of the whole return thing is He never left an exact time. Every Bible verse that has to do with His return is shrouded in mystery. The clear and somewhat frustrating reality is that we know He is coming but He never gave us a time.

Sadly, most of us do not live our lives in a way that shows we are eagerly awaiting our King’s return. At times we may look down at younger Christians for answering choice two in that hypothetical question. We need

to take a moment and be honest with ourselves, are we ready for Jesus to come back? It is hard to live out our walk with Jesus with such jubilant excitement every day of our lives. It is easy to have a relationship with God that seems to be built on doing. Luckily for us, Jesus already did everything for us. Our relationship with God should never be based on us doing. He already did; He arose and will return.

Matthew chapter 24 offers some amazing advice. Matthew 24:45 says, ***"Who then is the faithful and wise servant."*** So how do we live a life that is always focused on His return? We as Christians must be faithful and wise in all our actions. We must be faithful to glorify Him with all of the time, and in front of all the people we encounter. We must be wise to figure out what are the important things we must focus on and what are the urgent things that take us away from the important things. But remember, He is coming back. Are you ready?

LUKE 12:35-38

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

There are many things that you grow out of as you get older. Some of them you are grateful you have aged out of, like voice cracks or the fear of what is under your bed. Other things I find myself missing at times. One such thing is the feeling of excitement that would not let you go to sleep. I can remember spending many nights lying awake with excitement before Christmas, birthdays, vacations, and field trips. There is some unique energy that waiting for something exciting can give you. It allows even the most tired child to stay awake with anticipation. What was something you were so excited about as a child that you could not sleep?

Luke 12:35-38 says, ***"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!"***

Jesus is teaching His disciples using a parable. In the parable, He is comparing them to servants waiting for their master to come home. He gives them two distinct commands here as they wait, ***"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning."*** These commands can be summed up to say: stay ready and stay watching.

Jesus is returning, but we have no clue when. If anyone tells you they know, run! So, because no one knows, we must stay ready. As time goes by, more people tend to become apathetic or complacent about Jesus' return. Jesus says not to fall asleep, not to slack off, but to be ready for

action. What do you think Jesus means when He says, ***"Stay dressed for action"***? Why is it so easy to become complacent regarding Jesus' return?

The reason I started off this devotion by talking about the childlike ability to stay awake when excited is that we should be excited about Christ's return. It should be something that we look forward to and continue to keep in our minds. When Jesus returns, pain, sorrow, hardship, and other difficulties believers experience will cease, and we will be with Him for eternity. This is something worthy of excitement and should be something that gives us hope as we anticipate it. What are some things that you are looking forward to in Heaven? Do you live with the return of Christ in mind? How so?

Spend some time thanking God for the promise of Christ's return. Ask Him to keep you ready and watching for His return. Live with the hope and motivation to follow Him as you wait with excitement.

2 PETER 3:10-18

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

My son and I had a little game we liked to play. The game could be called, "I will hide from you and at the perfect moment, I will jump out to make you terrified." It was a wonderful game, and if I do say so myself, I was pretty good at it. When I arrived home, I strategically looked through the mirrors in our home, knowing where my son liked to hide. Instead of scaring me, I usually scared him. It was a wonderful game!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NIV), Paul gives us a glimpse into the return of Christ. He says in verse 10, ***"The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."*** Peter then provides more details of Jesus' coming and follows up in with a challenge for the church.

"Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:14).

Peter's challenge is clear. Because we know the return of Christ is coming, we ought to live holy and godly lives. He urges those of us in the church to reflect on what kind of person we are going to be. It is interesting to consider the word ***"diligent,"*** used by Peter in the passage above. As Warren Wiersbe suggests, "We are to have an 'expectant attitude' that will make a difference in our conduct." Paul also encourages Titus, in Titus 2:13 to wait ***"for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*** If we lose sight of that blessed hope, we are in grave danger of losing our walk with Him.

In Mark chapter 13, Jesus speaks specifically about his return (I encourage you to take time to read the entire chapter). Jesus uses the phrase ***"guard yourself"*** multiple times. The KJV translates it as ***"take heed."*** Over and over, Jesus warns the people to take heed (verses 5, 9, 23, and 33). Verse

33 specifically says, ***"Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."*** In other words, be alert and be ready. This is not because we know the specific day and the specific time, but because we have a specific call on our lives as followers of Christ. This call is to live diligently, intentionally, holy, and godly every minute of every day. We are to be making every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

I remember coming home one day, forgetting about the little game I played with my son. He slipped behind a wall without me knowing. As I walked around the corner, he jumped out and scared me really good. He was so thrilled that he finally got his dad. I hope that we do not become so focused on the things of this world that we forget about the Lord's return.

REVELATION 22:20-21

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

Growing up, our youth group went to Hiawatha Youth Camp each summer. I have some incredible memories and friends I keep in touch with to this day made from the weeks on Piot Lake in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan. One memory I have is of a girl singing a song. Her name was Angela Carpenter, and she sang the most impactful song I had ever heard in my life. The song was by Crystal Lewis and its called, *"People Get Ready, Jesus Is Comin'."* I remember sitting in the auditorium as a thirteen-year-old boy thinking to myself about this song. I attached the lyrics and encourage you to check it out on YouTube, iTunes, or some other media source.

Lord, I'm ready now
I'm waiting for Your triumphant return
You're coming so soon
This world has nothing for me
I find my peace and joy solely in You
Only in You
I want the world to see that
You're alive and living well in me
Let me be a part of the harvest
For the days are few
He's coming soon

People get ready Jesus is comin'
Soon we'll be going home
People get ready Jesus is comin'
To take from the world His own

There will be a day
When we will be divided right and left
For those who know Him
And those who do not know
Those who know Him well
Will meet Him in the air
Hallelujah
God is with us
Those who do not know
They will hear "Depart, I knew you not."
For my friends you see
There will be a day when we'll be counted
So know Him well, know Him well

People get ready Jesus is comin'
Soon we'll be going home
People get ready Jesus is comin'
To take from the world His own

After hearing her sing this song, I can still recall exactly how I felt. The song was dynamic and beautiful, even moving some to tears, but in me, it created a different emotion. It created fear. I felt scared for the return of Christ. The very last words in the Bible, found in Revelation 22:20-21, tell us that ***"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen"*** A great message of the return of a Savior should bring comfort and joy, but I did not feel that. I knew Jesus was my Lord and Savior and had committed my life to Him, yet something about His return created fear and anxiety in me. Looking back at this memory, I can now understand why I felt that way (13-year-old boys cannot explain anything!). 2 Peter 3:14 is a great explanation for me. ***"Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace."*** That word ***"diligent"*** is so convicting because it requires action on my part. It is not required for salvation or entrance into Heaven, but it is a charge to us as believers. Revelation is clear - He is coming back. No man knows the day or the hour for the return of Christ, but we are given clear direction for when He returns - be busy doing His

work. As a 13-year-old, I was not busy in the work of Jesus Christ. I liked to live life according to my desires and do my things, and that continued into my twenties. But this verse is an attention grabber. Christ could return tomorrow, and how will He find me? How will He find you?

The words of the song are clear, *"people get ready, Jesus is comin'."* To the unbeliever, I beg you to get ready by giving your life to Christ. No one is guaranteed tomorrow! To the believer, are you diligently at work for Christ? That does not mean you have to quit your job and move to a foreign country and start preaching (if you are called to this, then do it!). You are called to shine the light of Christ in your workplace, your family, and all those around you. We as followers of Christ have an incredible opportunity to point people to Jesus. There is no need for anxiety or fear when it comes to Christ's return. Take it from someone who has conquered this feeling. Now, I just want to be found ***"diligent!"*** May we live our lives today like He will return tomorrow, knowing that there are millions around the world and across the street that need to hear about Jesus!

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NKJV)

"When will Christ return?" is a question I have been asked numerous times through the years, and it is a question that has sparked much debate throughout the church age. But we are going to settle it right here and right now. Are you ready? No, I am asking you, "Are you ready?" That is the answer; be ready! The answer to "when is Jesus coming back?" is to be ready for Him to come back at any time.

Jesus said, ***"Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming"*** Matthew 25:13 (NKJV).

He also said, ***"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"*** Matthew 24:44 (NKJV).

Pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, Mc-Rib (lol), are all (except for that last one) ways of talking about when exactly Christ will come. The "pre-trib" view (which also happens to be the right view, haha) says that Jesus Christ

will appear before the tribulation period (described in detail in Revelation chapters 6-19) to take all believers out of the world and into Heaven to be with Him forever. The "mid-trib" view says that Jesus will appear during the tribulation, taking all believers out of the world and into Heaven before the wrath of God being poured out on the whole world during the last 3 1/2 years of the 7-year tribulation period. The "post-trib" view says that there is no taking of believers to Heaven, but that Christ will come back to Earth at the end of the tribulation period and rule and reign forever.

Now, we can debate these views, we can argue our points, but the truth is, no one knows when He will come. That is what He said. He said He would come at an hour we do not expect Him. But hear this, He is coming. We can be sure about that.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 we have an interesting situation. It seems that the Thessalonian believers were very troubled concerning the return of Christ. It is clear from this passage and many others that the early Christians lived their lives expecting that Jesus would return at any moment. They understood that when He returned, they would be "changed." They would immediately put on a "new heavenly body" if you will, to enter Heaven. But then the question, what about their loved ones who died long ago? What would happen to them? Will they be "changed" or are they just tough out of luck? Paul's words to them assure them that Christ has no problem raising their deceased ("sleeping") loved ones at His coming. We will all be together when He comes. It was meant to comfort them, and it did.

There are two things we must understand and agree on regardless of where you land on eschatological (end times) debates. First, Christ is coming. Do not forget that or lose sight of it. Second, He can come at any moment. It will be at an hour we do not expect.

These were the realities that the early Christians understood. Day by day they looked for His coming. The Bible tells us that this is right and good for us as His people. 1 John 3:3 (NKJV) says, ***"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*** Jesus said, ***"Surely I am coming quickly."*** and so we say with Apostle John ***"Even so, come Lord Jesus!"*** Revelation 22:20 (NKJV).

MATTHEW 25:13

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:13

Jesus is coming back. That simple phrase may thrill your heart or go right in one ear and out the other. Hearing that Jesus is returning may be old news to you, or it may incite apocalyptic prepping. Regardless of your specific view on end times, current cultural trends, astrological interpretations, historical patterns, the stock market, or whichever particular way you receive the news of Christ's imminent return, the fact remains, Jesus is coming back to earth.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He often spoke of His impending death on the cross. The disciples were so taken back by this thought, that Peter even rebuked Jesus for implying such (in Peter's view) nonsense (Matthew 16:22-23). Jesus also talked at length of His return as Holy Judge.

Many parables taught an incredibly important principle for believers throughout all ages. We must live every day ready and eagerly prepared for the arrival of Jesus Christ. In Matthew chapters 24 and 25, we read a sermon, or more appropriately, a conversation that Jesus had with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Just to the east of the temple, Jesus sat on a hillside that provides, even to this day, a beautiful, panoramic view of the city of Jerusalem and, more specifically, the temple mount. He began to speak to them about the impending destruction of the temple (70 AD) and His return. Keep in mind that He had yet to die, be buried, or rise from the dead, so this conversation would have been difficult to understand. But Jesus gave the disciples and us two main tasks to be doing while the master is away. Simply put, Jesus tells us to watch and work.

We must be watching for His return (Matthew 25:13). We cannot become so enamored with this world that we are not setting our hope in the kingdom yet to come. We must not just be watching, but working, diligently for the Master. He has entrusted to each of us His treasures that we must daily be using to further the Lord's interests. Watch and work - that is our call while we wait for the return of the Lord.

9

HELL AND HEAVEN

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON



Hell and Heaven are real, actual places of eternity. A description is probably not necessary as people regularly use the words. The word "Hell" is spoken by people who do not even believe in God: hotter than Hell, it will be a cold day in Hell, come Hell or high water, not a chance in Hell, it hurts like Hell, give them Hell, and go to Hell! If they want to give the extreme opposite analogy, they might say: A marriage made in Heaven, good Heavens, in Hog Heaven, Heaven help us, Heaven on earth, Heaven sent, it is heavenly, or even some paradise references. Hell is the epitome of negative, horrible, abominable, grotesque, appalling, and awful, while Heaven is portrayed as glorious, delightful, divine, wonderful, paradisiacal, perfect, and blissful.

1. What other phrases have you heard for Hell?

_____

_____

_____

2. What other phrases have you heard for Heaven?

_____

_____

_____

Everyone will end up in either place forever.

John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. This verse refers to both places, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

3. How are both places described here?

_____

_____

_____

4. What determines each person's destination?

_____

_____

_____

Romans 6:23 says, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

5. Where does one find eternal life?

_____

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Romans 2:6-8 adds, ***"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury."***

6. What is the result for those who are self-seeking and ignore the truth?

_____

_____

_____

THERE IS A HELL

"I think hell's a real place where real people spend a real eternity." Jerry Falwell

"There is no injustice in the grace of God. God is as just when He forgives a believer as when He casts a sinner into hell." Charles Spurgeon

7. Do you agree or disagree with these quotes?

_____

_____

_____

Revelation 21:8 says, ***"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."***

8. How is Hell described?

_____

_____

_____

"He also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Revelation 14:10-11

9. What descriptions are given of Hell?

_____

_____

_____

"If we had more hell in the pulpit, we would have less hell in the pew." Billy Graham

10. Do you think Hell is discussed too much or not enough?

_____

_____

_____

Matthew 25:46 adds, ***"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."***

11. How long is each destination?

_____

_____

_____

"I would rather go to heaven alone than go to hell in company." R.A. Torrey

12. How would you reply to the person who says, “I do not care where I go because I will have friends in both places?”

_____

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_____

“Gehenna” is a Greek word translated as Hell. Charles C. Ryrie wrote that it is referencing a “refuse dump and a place of perpetual fire and loathsomeness, and the valley in Jerusalem illustrates the fire and awfulness of the lake of fire.”

13. As a summary, how would you describe Hell?

_____

_____

_____

THERE IS A HEAVEN

“To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here.” Jonathan Edwards

14. How do you view the worst day on earth compared to Hell, and the best day now compared to Heaven?

_____

_____

_____

Jesus says in John 14:1-3, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”***

15. What does Jesus say about Heaven?

_____
_____
_____

In Luke 23:43, Jesus is talking to a thief on the cross, ***"And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'"***

16. What images come to mind with the word ***"Paradise?"***

_____
_____
_____

Matthew 10:28 says, ***"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."***

17. Who is being referenced?

_____
_____
_____

Matthew 7:13-14 says, ***"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."***

18. Does everyone go to Heaven? If not, do the majority of people?

_____
_____
_____

Finally, Revelation 21:3-4 says, ***"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will***

dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

19. How is Heaven described?

_____

_____

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"For the Christian, heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be forever with Him." William Barclay

NOTES

REVELATION 14:10-11

PASTOR RYAN STORY

We who know Jesus, have an amazing life ahead of us. All of us who have cried out for His grace and love have had our eternity changed. Regardless of how good or bad your life's circumstances have been, our eternity with Jesus is going to be indescribable! This is where you can cue the song by MercyMe, *"I Can Only Imagine."* For those part of Christ's church, we all know the gift that is awaiting us one day. As amazing as that will be, there is always that sobering feeling in the back of my mind that screams, "What about those who do not?" Most estimate that 33% of the world would profess that they are Christ followers. Without even breaking that percentage down by who are truly following Christ, that means that only one in three people are going to be able to experience Heaven. Sixty Six percent of the world will be on the other side of eternity, Hell. By simple math, that means in just our lives, 5 billion people who currently live at the same time as us, are heading to an eternity that is without Christ Jesus.

Revelation 14:11 says, ***"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."*** I cannot think of any worse description of a place to spend eternity. Sadly, we do not live our lives as if this is the eternal destination for the majority. Surely, if Christ-followers knew that people were destined for such a horrendous fate, we would step in and do something. Unfortunately, we all know we are too selfish, too self-involved, and too self-motivated to want to stop someone from this fate.

In the book, *"When A Nation Forgets God,"* written by Dr. Erwin Lutzer, the author tells the following story from an eyewitness in Germany during the Holocaust:

“I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it because what could we do to stop it. A railroad track ran behind our small church, and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance, and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars. Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews in route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming, and when we heard the whistle blow, we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.” Then the eyewitness shared with Pastor Lutzer, “Although years have passed, I still hear the train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me, forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”

How can a Christian sit idly as we know for a fact that our family members, neighbors, co-workers, and friends will spend eternity with no rest and their torment will be visible forever and ever? As Christians, we are not responsible for the outcome of them coming to know Jesus, the only thing we can be responsible for is opening our mouths and warning people about the fate that awaits them. Surely, if we knew where people would spend eternity, it would change the way we live our daily lives.

JOHN 3:16-17

PASTOR JOSH YATES

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." John 3:16-17

John 3:16 is one of, if not the most, recognized verses in the Bible. The overwhelming majority of people at least know of the reference. There are many reasons for that, but one of the biggest reasons is that this reference has been written on poster boards and held up behind the goalposts of thousands of football games broadcast on national TV. This reference has been seen at numerous sporting events that have been widely broadcast. Why is that?

This passage of Scripture is the most concise description of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus is telling us how much God loved the world by giving us what we would see as His most precious gift, His own Son. Every time I look at that, I believe it to be true. There really is no person on the face of the Earth for whom I would sacrifice either of my daughters. I would sacrifice myself for them, not the other way around. Yet, God showed His love for us by sending His one and only Son to give us eternal life. Not only that, but He sent Him to save us, not to condemn us! What a gift we have been given. John 3:16 is the biggest sign of God's love that He has given us. We can be sure of God's love through Jesus.

I love how commentator Kent Hughes describes this awesome truth:

For God - *The Greatest Lover*
so loved - *The Greatest Degree*
the world, - *The Greatest Company*

that he gave - *The Greatest Act*
his only begotten Son, - *The Greatest Gift*
that whosoever - *The Greatest Opportunity*
believeth - *The Greatest Simplicity*
in him - *The Greatest Attraction*
should not perish, - *The Greatest Promise*
but - *The Greatest Difference*
have - *The Greatest Certainty*
everlasting life. - *The Greatest Possession*

Hughes continues, “Fellow believers, we are loved by God! We need to get used to this, but we should never get over it.” May we never get complacent about how much God loves us. Our sin may be great, but His love, mercy, and grace are greater.

JOHN 3:36

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

When you hear the words “eternal life,” what immediately comes to your mind? John, the disciple, speaks of eternal life or everlasting life more than anyone else in the Bible. He uses it 18 times in the Gospel of John and six more times in the Epistle 1 John.

John states in John 3:36, ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*** We see here as in other verses that eternal life is through no one else other than Jesus Christ. In John 6:68 (KJV), Peter answers Jesus, ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”.*** Jesus tells us in John 10:28 (KJV), ***“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand”***. Jesus is the way, the only way to eternal life.

I do believe there is some confusion though among believers when it comes to eternal life. In Daniel 12:2 it says, ***“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*** Life is everlasting no matter who you are. For some, it will be spent with the King of kings, for others under the wrath of God.

The other problematic view I see with many when it comes to eternal life is the focus on the destination. Yes, it is wonderful to know that Heaven is our home. It is exciting to think about Jesus who has gone and who is preparing a place for us. However, John tells us that eternal life is not just about the destination, it is about the trip. He writes in John 17:3, ***“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*** Eternal life is about a wonderful walk with Jesus that starts here on earth.

Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? When I was a child, our family vacation was always to Myrtle Beach. I can remember jumping into our great Pontiac 6000 and heading south. Flying was not an option, we drove. I can remember thinking how much I could not wait to get there so our vacation could begin. Thinking back on those amazing times makes me pause. I look back and think that vacation did not begin when we got there, it began when we left. I fondly remember those times in the car, the places that we stopped, and the adventures that we had. Now having a family of my own, we often have chosen to drive instead of flying.

Remember eternal life is not just the destination of Heaven. It is about the amazing walk with Jesus Christ.

REVELATION 21:8

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

Eternity = Everlasting, infinity, time without end, timelessness, or in the words of Squints Palledorous, “FOR...EV...ER!” This is the most sobering concept in the Christian walk. The Bible is clear that if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you will spend eternity with Him. Eternity will be a place like no other, a place not built by the hands of man. It is a place with streets of gold, feasts celebrating the Lamb, and a house or mansion prepared specifically for me by the Master Builder Himself. Heaven will be a place where we celebrate what God has done for us and worship Him. I definitely can not say what every detail will look like, but I can tell you it will be a celebration like no other. I love this quote from Pastor John McArthur, “Heaven is a realm of unsurpassed joy, unfading glory, undiminished bliss, unlimited delights and unending pleasures.” Sounds awesome!

The other side of the sobering concept is the realization of the alternative place of Heaven - Hell. It is a horrific place. The Bible tells us it is a place of darkness and death, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is a place separate from the light of Jesus and absent of all hope. Revelation 21:8 describes it as a place that burns with fire and sulfur. Some may toss Hell and its description aside as imaginary, but it is a real place, just like Heaven. For those that never receive Christ as their Lord and Savior and never confess their sins, this is the place they will end up in for eternity. I do not say that with pride of happiness, but of fear and desperation knowing that millions of people around the world are heading for a future placed in Hell. I struggle even to type this, knowing that every second someone dies around the world, and they end up in one of two places, eternity with Christ in Heaven or eternity in Hell separated from Christ. There is no middle ground. There are no other options.

Revelation 21:8 tells us, ***“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the***

detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Reading this verse, you may think, "Hey, I have lied. Does that mean I am going to Hell?" Or fill in your sin in place of lying and you and I are doomed to Hell. However, God does not look at us this way. When we are saved we become co-heirs, royal, holy, and children of the Almighty God. The Bible tells us that He has forgiven the sins of the past, present, and future. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 tells us, ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."*** That word reconciliation means to restore, and our relationship with Christ has been restored. We are in good standing with God, not by our works or deeds, but what Jesus did for us on the cross. When God looks at us, He sees that our debt has been paid through Christ, and counts us as righteous.

You may see yourself as a liar, coward, faithless, sexually immoral, or any of the other sins listed in Revelation 21:8, but if you are a child of God, that is not how He sees you. He views you through the lens of the blood of the Lamb that paid our debt; we are free and have hope for eternity with Him. If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are a royal priesthood and do not let the enemy tell you differently. You have an assured hope in Heaven. If you do not know Christ or you are not sure, please take this time to cry out to God in your need for Him. If I can personally help you with this, please do not hesitate to ask. There is a Heaven and a Hell, and God has made a way for you to go to Heaven. Will you follow?

ROMANS 2:6-8

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"Who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil."
Romans 2:6-9 (NKJV)

On July 8, 1741, American preacher Jonathan Edwards stood before the Enfield Connecticut congregation and read the words of what is now one of the most famous sermons in history. The sermon was entitled, *"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."* In it, Edwards vividly describes the severity of Hell, the immediate danger every mortal, sinful person is in, and the reality of eternity. This sermon found its mark and had a tremendous effect on the congregation that morning. Those present that day reported shrieks and screams from the unconverted as they realized their lost condition and the seriousness that they could at any moment enter eternity. The reality of an eternal Hell shook both the church there and the church across America for many years to come.

One of the most shocking pictures Edwards paints is that of eternity being unending. He said: "It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see along forever a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul. And you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages in wrestling with this almighty, merciless vengeance. And then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been

spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point (moment) to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite."

Without question, this is why Jesus warned us so often against Hell. He spoke of it continually. Indeed, He came to rescue us from that dreadful place, to snatch us from those merciless and eternal flames. It is also why every apostle throughout the New Testament pleads with us to trust Christ, lest we send ourselves there.

In Romans 2:6-8, the Apostle Paul describes the difference between Heaven and Hell. He says that eternal life, blessing, and honor will be given to those who are born again. Eternal life is promised to those who have trusted in the work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. But to those who have not, to those who have (every single day of their lives) refused to trust Christ, rejected the truth and spent a lifetime serving themselves, they will suffer an eternity of the indignation and wrath of God. This will mean unending, unyielding tribulation and anguish. There will not be a moment of release from this. There will not be a moment of rest. There will not be a moment of relief. Hell is described as a worm that devours and never stops, and fires that are never extinguished.

Someone at this point might say, "How could God allow this?" But that is the wrong question. For God has done everything possible to keep a person from this. What more could He have done? He came; He died for our sins in our place on our cross. He went through the horrors of Hell and was raised from the dead to give us life. No, the question must never be, "How can God allow this?" The question can only be, "Why would anyone refuse Him?" "Why would anyone refuse His offer to rescue them?"

God does not send people to Hell. God sent His Son to keep us from Hell. People send themselves to Hell by refusing the Son and His sacrifice. This is something they must do every single day of their lives until they finally confirm it with their last breath.

For at the end of the day, eternity is where we get forever what we proved in our lives what we wanted most. Heaven belongs to those who love Him and have run to Him to be saved. It is those who want to spend eternity

with the One who has rescued them, for He is their treasure.

Hell belongs to all those who all their lifetime refused and rejected Him. They will get forever what they proved by their lives they wanted most, existence apart from God.

MATTHEW 25:46

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matthew 25:46

One of my favorite lines of poetry is from a Robert Frost poem entitled, *"The Road Not Taken."* At the end of this beautifully written word picture, he writes:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

For whatever Frost's convictions were, this illustration of two clear, distinct paths was a consistent and clear theme in the teaching of Jesus. Nearly 2,000 years before Frost, Jesus, preaching on a Galilean hillside said, ***"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few"*** (Matthew 7:13-14).

Two clear, unmistakably clear paths are laid before each person. The signs that label these two paths can be different: Christ or Satan, belief or unbelief, saved or unsaved, repentant or unrepentant, and the like. One road is wide and well-traveled, while the other is narrow and difficult.

One day my wife, so brilliantly, described the road to me as a single lane path on the edge of a cliff, where we are often forced to walk sideways with our backs pressed against the cliff-side because the path has become so

narrow. But like every road, these gates and paths of which Jesus spoke, have two very different destinations. The narrow gate and road lead to life, and the wide gate and road lead to destruction. One road leads to Heaven and the other Hell. Heaven is described as eternal life and joy in the presence of God. Hell is described as eternal suffering and sorrow away from the presence of God.

Every person has passed through one of these gates and is currently on one of these two roads. Which have you chosen? Have you passed through the gate of repentance and belief in Jesus Christ? If the answer is no, then quickly take the next exit, repent of your sin, believe in Jesus, and start walking the path of righteousness that leads to eternal life.

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having "all things in common." They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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