

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Absolutely Certain: Why is there only one way to be saved?

I remember as a child one of my favourite stories was a picture book called 'The Bear Scouts'. In it a young bear was being taught all sorts of boyish things – either from the bear scout manual or from his know-it-all dad. On one occasion, they came to a massively steep hill with a very twisty path over it. Rejecting that path as too hard, the dad recommends an easy looking path that just went around the hill. Ignoring the danger signs, he marches off, only to lose a part of his trousers as he is attacked by a nasty looking crocodile! I guess the message that stuck with me over the years was that sometimes there is only one way to do some things, even if it is not easy.

We do live in a world where the concept of absolutes is challenged. Over the past three weeks we have looked at some things that, as it were, are just not open to discussion. They are true. We conclude this series, then, by looking at the question "Why is there only one way to be saved?"

The difficulty most people have with salvation is that they do not recognise their need to be saved. Before we try to answer today's question, then, we need to go back to the beginning – in fact the very beginning of the Bible. In Genesis 1:1, we read "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*". Everything in the universe belongs to Him. 1 John 1:5 tells us that "*God is light*", whilst 4:8 says "*God is love*". These two fundamental characteristics mean that although God's desire is to bless, He cannot tolerate wrong in any form. As the prophet Habakkuk puts it, "*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness*" (Habakkuk 1:13). However, that leaves us all with a big problem. In Paul's letter to the Romans 3:10 and 23, we read, "*There is none righteous, no not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" The absolutely perfect standard God sets means that even the best of mankind falls hopelessly short. Paul later defines for us what sin is when he writes in 14:23: "*for whatever is not from faith is sin.*" Anything that we do that does not spring from a total dependence upon God falls short of His perfection. The awful consequence of our sin is spelt out clearly in 6:23: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" When Paul speaks about death here, he means much more than just a physical end to life. Death implies a separation from God and all that He is. Some people foolishly joke about the prospect of Hell as a party with all their friends. But imagine a place with no love and no light – those two essential characteristics of God. There will be no friends in Hell! So we all have a problem having done that which God cannot tolerate and deserving nothing but the judgement of a pure and holy God. What we need is forgiveness!

Imagine I was to go to the Gaza strip today. I could wander around or make a broadcast on the radio saying that I forgive the Israelis for their bombing. I could then go into Southern Israel and repeat the message that I forgave Hamas for all their rocket attacks. Quite rightly, on both sides there would be scorn and derision. On what authority did I dare to pronounce forgiveness? It was not I who had been wronged. My pronouncements would be nothing but hot air.

There was an interesting episode in the life of Jesus. We read about it in Matthew 9:2-7: "*Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.'* And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, '*This Man blasphemes!*' But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, '*Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you' or to say 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' – then He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.'* And he arose and departed to his house."

At first glance the scribes were absolutely right. They assumed that Jesus was blaspheming when He forgave the sins of the paralytic man. None but God Himself can forgive sinners. What they utterly failed to realise was that they were standing in the very presence of God Himself. Only God has the authority to forgive sinners.

So far, then, we have established that we all need to be saved as we have all sinned, and that it is God alone who has the authority to forgive sinners. Now let us imagine another situation. Perhaps my car was wrecked the other day by someone who jumped a red light and drove straight into me. The other driver was clearly drunk and unfit to drive. Now in court, the evidence has been presented and the guilt confirmed. However, the judge then refuses to condemn as he hears some mitigating story as to why the accused, who just happened to be some rich star, was rushing and drunk at the time. In fact he goes further and dismisses the case. Although the judge had the authority to do that, can you imagine the headlines in the newspaper? And I would certainly feel aggrieved. We all instinctively feel that it is only

right that if some offence has been committed then there is a penalty that has to be paid. However, if the judge was to pass some custodial sentence as befitting the crime, but was then to get down from the bench and go to the prison cell himself, well that would be altogether different. Not only had he the authority to judge the case, but the penalty for the crime had been passed and paid by the judge himself!

Now this is what God has done, as He took on human form, in the person of Jesus. All the sins of all of mankind throughout all of time are known to God. He has made a full accounting of them and made a righteous judgement on them, condemning them utterly. However, instead of that condemnation falling on each one of us, He has then paid the penalty Himself in full.

In the words of the hymn writer, JD Smith:

*“All thy sins were laid upon Him,  
Jesus bore them on the tree;  
God, who knew them, laid them on Him,  
And, believing thou art free.”*

No doubt, the words of the hymn were based upon 1 Peter 2:24: *“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.”* Once and for all time that full price has been paid. During those hours of darkness on the cross, when nobody was allowed to see the intense suffering of the Lord Jesus, He made a full answer to the problem of sin. So Paul could say, in Romans 3:22, *“even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”* The death of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to save the whole world, if the whole world would believe, and to make a righteous basis for the forgiveness of everybody. So in the Gospel of John, 14:6, we read: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”* When Thomas wanted to know the way to God, Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the only way. It was not ‘a way’ but ‘the way’. Why? Because He was the One who would pay the price that would lay the basis for a righteous relationship. Indeed He was the only One who could do so. You see, much as I might be prepared to give my life for someone else, I am utterly unable to do so righteously, as I have my own sin to answer for. Only One who was perfect could then be a suitable substitute for me. Having no sin of His own, He was able to take my place. Not only did His perfection mean that He was able to take my place, His person meant that He was able to make the sacrifice. Imagine just for a moment, impossible though it is, that I was able to answer for your sins. Well, how would the deal be made, so to speak. I could not go into God’s presence – as a sinner that would mean instant death. In the same way that I would be destroyed long before I got anywhere near the surface of the Sun whose power is too great for my physical body to withstand, so I could never come into the presence of God and live, for the power of His holiness is far greater than that of the sun. But by the same token, God could not communicate His favour towards me by just coming in all His glory. I could not tell the birds that visit my garden that there was a nasty cat coming, just by running out and shouting the warning. I don’t speak the language and my presence would surely frighten them all away before I even spoke! Only by becoming like a bird could I pass on the warning. So on both sides, no ordinary person could establish a righteous basis for the forgiveness of sins. But what you or I could not do, Jesus has done. So we read in 1 Timothy 2:5-6: *“For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.”* In the mysterious, wonderful, inexplicable person of the Lord Jesus who was fully God and fully Man without diminishing either, there is One who was able to pay the price for our sins and to establish the foundation for our forgiveness before God. No wonder we read in 2 Corinthians 9:15: *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”*

So far then, we have established that God made us but that we are in a state of rebellion because of our sin. We have all sinned because we do not do everything in faith, or total dependence upon God. Our sin separates us from God, because of His purity. It is only God who can meaningfully forgive sins. He is able to do this, without compromising His purity, because He Himself by His death, in the person of the Lord Jesus, on the cross at Calvary, has met His own demands for sin to be condemned.

We are now ready to give an absolute answer to the question that we started off with this morning. Why is there only one way to be saved? Very simply, because there is only one Saviour. There will be no one in God’s presence who is not there apart from the completed work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary. He has done everything that is necessary for the sins of the whole world to be dealt with forever. There is absolutely nothing that I can do to earn my salvation or add to it in any way. As we have already considered, in Jesus’ own words “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” These words are simple words to understand and cannot reasonably be misinterpreted. Relationship with God as Father, because of sins forgiven, can only come about because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Not only that, but only in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ can a full understanding of the person of God be gained. He is the full and complete revelation of God to man.

When we were at school, we dreaded seeing the letters ATQ over a piece of homework. We knew we were in for a bad mark. We had failed to **Answer The Question** asked (ATQ), instead answering what we thought the question was

asking. Well, having answered the question asked this morning, with an emphatic 'Because there is only one Saviour', I want to consider how this applies to different situations, if you like answering the questions that some may have been thinking the question was asking.

Most definitely we are not saved by living in a particular country. I hesitate to say Christian England, for I do not see much reason to call it such. Nor are we saved by having parents or friends who were Christians. Nor does reading the Bible, prayer etc. save us though these things are good in themselves to do. Nor does the church save us. Again, we say there is only one way to be saved, and that is by believing – by which we mean a life changing commitment, rather than simply intellectual assent – that what Jesus did, He did for me. My only role is accepting His completed work on my behalf. Sadly, the church in general, through all of time has by and large completely failed to do what it should have done. More precisely, I have failed to do and be what God expects of me. So it is no use saying that we find salvation by going to church or acting like people who call themselves Christian. Nor can we dismiss the claims that God makes in the Bible just because of the failure of those who say they believe. Individual responsibility is exactly that – my response as an individual to the revelation I have had concerning God.

So, some might say, 'What about the babies who die?' I have no doubt that they will be found to be in the presence of God. Jesus has died for their sins and they were not of an age to reject that finished work. Indeed we speak of childlike faith, that instinctive acceptance that children tend to lose as they grow older. If we can speak of it in such terms, all are saved until they choose to reject the Saviour. But then some might say, 'Well, that is all very well, but what about those who lived and died before Jesus was born. How can they be saved? They lived before Jesus, so how could they possibly believe in Him?' But such questions confuse a living Christian faith with salvation, and the two are not quite the same thing. Obviously, Abraham or Hannah or David or whoever, could not have believed on Jesus, and expressed that faith in the way that I can today. However, for example in Genesis 15:6, we read: "*And [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*" Abraham had faith in God as far as God had revealed Himself to Abraham. He demonstrated that faith on numerous occasions, most notably in the story recounted in Genesis 22. But God accounts Abraham as saved on the basis that years later, His Son would die for Abraham's sins. The basis of Abraham's salvation is exactly the same as for you or me today – the completed work of Jesus upon the cross. However the expression of that faith, and the blessings that he will receive, are different and suitable to the way that God had chosen to reveal Himself to him. So Abraham was not a Christian but he was saved!

Finally, we need to address the question as to whether only those who practise Christianity today are saved. Well, in the final analysis, we must leave these sorts of things to God, who alone is able to judge. It is really not our business. Certainly we can say that an individual who rejects the work that Jesus has done cannot find salvation, regardless of what he believes, or how fervently he believes it. However, even today, I think there are those who have never heard about the work of the Lord Jesus and so have never had the opportunity to choose for Him. They may worship God, calling Him all sorts of names, out of a pure heart, although unaware of the full revelation of light that we have in Christ Jesus.

In his book '*The Last Battle*', CS Lewis writes §And all the creatures who looked at Aslan with fear and hatred swerved to their right, and disappeared into his huge black shadow, which streamed away to the left of the doorway. The children never saw them again. I don't know what became of them. But the others looked in the face of Aslan and loved him, though some of them were frightened at the same time. And all these came in at the Door, in on Aslan's right. There were some very strange specimens among them. But Eustace had no time to wonder about that sort of thing (and anyway it was no business of his) for a great joy put everything else out of his head.' Later he recounts a conversation between the Glorious One and Emeth, the enemy of the Narnians and a follower of the false god Tash. 'But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said 'Son, thou art welcome'. But I said, 'Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash.' He answered 'Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to Me.' Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, 'Lord, is it then true, as the ape said, that thou and Tash are one?' The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but His wrath was not against me) and said, 'It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deeds are accepted. Dost thou understand child?' I said, 'Lord, thou knowest how much I understand.' But I said also (for the truth constrained me), 'yet I have been seeking Tash all my days.' 'Beloved', said the Glorious One, 'unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.'§

There are those who have never heard the Gospel, who by their actions, even though their language may fall short of the full revelation of God in Christ, display a genuine faith. God is a righteous God and will never condemn any man unrighteously. When God told Abraham of the impending judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded with God for any righteous people in those towns. Abraham's supreme confidence in God to do the right thing is expressed

in his rhetorical question, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Genesis 18:25). We can similarly be confident that God will deal in a proper way with those who have never heard the Gospel of His Son. Obviously once an individual has heard the Gospel, of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, then it is on accepting Him and Him only, that that individual can be saved. As Peter could say, in Acts 4:12, "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" Paul, in preaching to the Athenians, could say in Acts 17:30, "*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*" Each and every one of us today has a responsibility to respond now to the Lord Jesus and accept His completed work at the cross. It is on this basis, and only this basis, that God can, and ever could, accept sinful man. The righteous basis for the forgiveness of all was established in the perfect substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary. What we do can never save us, but what we do does display the reality of what we really believe.

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