

## What is the gospel?

### Part 2: The Person of salvation

If you were part of the dark forces of evil attacking the church, how would you go about it? Satan seeks to prevent people from entering into a relationship with God, and when they do, he tries to prevent them from glorifying God and reproducing themselves. Well, the obvious place to attack is the very thing which will bring them into the family of God – the gospel. If the gospel is corrupted, people will knock on the wrong door, they will look to the wrong things, and they will depend on what cannot save to save.

We have been looking at the glorious gospel in this series, finding it out in its simplicity and purity. In Part 1, we saw the purpose of salvation is primarily for the glory of God. We saw that the gospel is really about God, not about man. We are the wonderful beneficiaries of salvation, but the main focus, like that of all things created, is God. We saw how a man-centred gospel will warp our view of sin, of salvation, of the very character of God.

In Part 2, we'll look at the Person of salvation. Salvation is fundamentally about a human being reconciled to another Person – their Creator. It is a profoundly personal encounter. That is why we say that Christianity is not a religion – it is a relationship. It makes the bold claim that the Creator of the universe can be known personally and intimately, and wants to be known as such. It makes the claim that God Himself has made a way for this to occur – and this comes through the Person of His Son – Jesus Christ.

If you think of the very term 'salvation' you realise that this is personal. If you are drowning, you are saved by a person. If you are in a fire, you are saved by a person. Well, salvation is a Person – the Person of God rescuing us from our own self-imposed destruction due to our sin. But for this transaction to take place – we need to be trusting in the right person.

It is a sad fact that many people are trusting in a person for their salvation who will not save them. The real tragedy is that they call this person Jesus – when who they are trusting in has nothing to do with Jesus. As Paul says:

*For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.*

**2 Corinthians 11:4**

Another Jesus. One that sounds a bit like Jesus – but is not Him. It's a case of mistaken identity. Too many people think that vague notions of who Christ is will be sufficient. Sadly, many liberals have continued to doubt the Bible's claims about Christ, and chase their tails as they talk endlessly about the historical Jesus, as if the historical Jesus differs from the biblical Jesus. Many religions include Christ in their overall teaching, but their Jesus is again different from the Bible's Jesus.

The very definition of what makes a cult a cult is what they believe about Christ. Most often, a cult denies biblical data as to who Christ is. Here is the tragedy: trusting someone other than Christ, while still calling him by that name – will not save you. Believing in another Jesus, while calling him Jesus, will not bring salvation. God insists we turn to His Son as revealed in His Word.

Mistaken identity will not be an excuse when it comes to eternal destiny. God will not save people who had a vague attachment to the name of Jesus, while existing in unbelief, denial or rejection of the meaning of that name. Jesus Himself says:

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

**Matthew 7:22-23**

How tragic that so many will have the Person of salvation wrong. They used His name, saw results in their work, actual power was present – but Jesus denies any involvement. There will be not a few, but ‘many,’ according to Christ Himself, who will be damned even though they were involved in what seemed to be Christian work. They named the name of Christ, but denied the actual Person behind the name. Clearly, it is crucial that we trust in the real Jesus. We need to know the Person of Salvation. Who is He?

**Acts 16:31** says, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”* A simple verse, with the gospel contained in it. How sad that some have abused this verse to teach a weak, compromised gospel. To see what it really means is done by focusing on who is this Lord Jesus Christ. Those three words help us break it down – Lord, Jesus and Christ.

## **1. Our Saviour is Lord**

Let’s start with the first one – ‘Lord.’ Both Old and New Testaments understand the use of the word Lord refers to God. The word ‘LORD’ in capital letters in our English Bibles stands for the personal name of God – Yahweh. Lord refers to the fact that Jesus is God. Every cult, heresy and aberration has started by minimising the deity of Christ. But Scripture is plain:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

**John 1:1**

*And the Word was made 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 1:14**

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

**1 Timothy 3:16**

*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily...*

**Colossians 2:9**

*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

**1 John 5:20**

To believe on the correct Person of salvation is to understand that your Saviour was God in human form. Jesus proved that He was God by doing works only God could do, by speaking words that only God could speak, by accepting worship when angels refused it and by claiming equality with God which no mere prophet would do.

Further, He directed people to Himself as the door, as the way, as the truth, the life, the Shepherd, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, the resurrection and the life. In order to make Christ out to be less than God, you have to just about tear out most of the New Testament.

Now cults that deny the deity of Christ make a big deal about the fact that Christ is the Son of God – and therefore, they claim, less than God. What they do not understand is this – Sonship in the Bible does not mean inferior or less. In fact, it means the opposite. It means that He is the very same essence. He is not a creation of God – He is the same essence of God – as a Son – He is the perfect expression of the Father. The Son of God is the Person of God visible to others.

*God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...*

**Hebrews 1:1-3**

If only the people who deny Christ's deity would read the book of Hebrews – it specifically makes Him much higher than the angels, much higher than the greatest prophet, much higher than the greatest high priest, and much higher than the only other king-priest – Melchizedek. Jesus was not less than God or created by God. In human form, He was submissive to His Father, but that does not denote inferiority. He always was, and is, and shall be, God the Son.

A similar heresy is to make Christ the very same as the Father and the Spirit. But **John 1:1** rules that out. It says Jesus was with God but yet it also says He was God. Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Spirit. Here's just a sprinkling of the many verses which make Jesus Christ a separate person from the Father and the Spirit, but co-equal with them in power, authority, and eternity.

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...*

**Matthew 28:19**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.*

**2 Corinthians 12:14**

*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

**1 Peter 1:2**

Most of the heresies today circle around a denial of the fact that Jesus is God. They may say Jesus was a great man, a wise teacher, or even that the Christ filled Him, but He was not God. But the deity of Christ is taught all the way from Old Testament appearances of the Angel of the Lord in Genesis to the appearance of the Risen Christ as the Alpha and Omega in Revelation. In fact, 2 Philippians tells us that God will make sure that every created thing will one day confess this fact.

I remember sharing with a youngster in a youth ministry. We were discussing the deity of Christ as a theme that night. This boy has claimed to accept Jesus as His Saviour already. But when we said that Jesus was God, he said, "Never – Jesus is not God!" He had accepted another Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God – not meaning like the cults say, 'created by God or less than God,' – but proceeding forth from the Father from eternity, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit:

*Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

**1 John 5:5**

## 2. Our Saviour is Jesus

The second word then in **Acts 16:31**, which tells us who to believe in, is Jesus. Jesus is really derived from the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Yeshua, or Joshua. Jesus was His human name – it emphasises His role as our saviour but also emphasises His humanity. Jesus is God, but He also was 100% human. He was virgin-born and grew up normally. He was not, as early false teaching said, ‘not truly human,’ but was in fact among people as a human being.

Jesus was a 100% literal human and 100% God-man. It is a divine paradox, not a contradiction, like the Trinity – three Persons, one God. The Christ did not descend on Jesus and leave Him at the cross, like some teach – He was born a man, lived, died and rose as one, while being God all the time.

This is the whole point of the virgin birth. Jesus was born of a virgin to unite these two thoughts – that He was fully God, and yet fully man. He was not born of the seed of man. But neither was He simply there, like He appeared as the Angel of the Lord in Old Testament times. He was *born*.

The humanity of Christ is crucial to a correct understanding of the Person of Jesus. He could not be a true High Priest if He was not human. He could not truly empathise, nor be a true substitute for men, if He was not a man Himself. The humanity of Christ is necessary for Christ to have truly died on the cross for us.

*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted. For as by One Man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*

**Hebrews 2:14-19**

The first Adam brought sin, and thus the second Adam brought righteousness through His perfect life, death and resurrection. Jesus was the epitome of what humanity was meant to be – a perfect reflection of God. A beautiful quote by Protestant theologian Philip Schaff so pictures our Lord:

*“His zeal never degenerated into passion, nor His constancy into obstinacy, nor His benevolence into weakness, nor His tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsociability or undue familiarity; His self-denial from moroseness; His temperance from austerity. He combined child-like innocence with manly strength, absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man, tender love to the sinner with uncompromising severity against sin, commanding dignity with winning humility, fearless courage with wise caution, unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness!”*

John again sums up the content of faith in Christ in **1 John 4:2-3**: “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

So the biblical Jesus is Lord; He is the Son of God, the Eternal second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, the eternal expression of the Father. He is also Jesus the man; the perfect, sinless human being. He is the epitome of humanity – everything a human was supposed to be, encapsulated in to one.

### **3. Our Saviour is Christ**

The final word in **Acts 16:31** is Christ. Christ is again the Greek approximation of the Hebrew *Maschiach*, or Messiah. This speaks of His role as the Promised Messiah. What was the Messiah to be or to do? He was to fulfil three roles, which only He could do. He was to be Prophet, Priest and King.

No other person would ever be able to combine these roles. Samuel was a prophet and a priest. David was a king and a prophet. Melchizedek was a king and a priest. But no one had ever had all three. Indeed Uzziah the king was punished for intruding upon the office of priest, even though he was king. Only Messiah would have the right and authority to be all three.

- **A prophet is one who went before the people to speak God's Word.**

A prophet represented God to man. Jesus did this by revealing the Father, as stated in **John 1:18**: *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* He fleshed out the divine character for us, and told us of God's plan. He gave the message of salvation to the world. He spoke for God, but He also spoke as God. In **Matthew 21:11**, the people identify Jesus as such: *"And the multitude said, this is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."*

- **A priest is one who went to God for the people.**

A priest presented atoning sacrifices for the sins of the people and prayed for them. Jesus became the priest who offered Himself on the cross for people once for all, and in so doing, mediated atonement between God and man. Today, as Risen Lord, He continues to pray for His people and intercede as a High Priest in heaven. Hebrews explains it:

*But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens...*

**Hebrews 7:24-26**

- **Finally, the king is one who rules and reigns over his people.**

Jesus is already crowned king over God's kingdom of believers, and someday He will be crowned king of all creation when all sin and rebellion is put down. The king is a prominent theme in Scripture, mostly because we innately recognise that someone in the universe is king over all. Human kings were really miniatures, weak portraits, of the divine sovereignty and rulership that Christ has.

*Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords...*

**1 Timothy 6:15**

To believe in Jesus as Christ is to believe He truly is God in the flesh (Prophet), that He is my only Saviour and atonement for sin (Priest) and to bow before Him as my Lord (King). Accepting Jesus and God, Lord and

Saviour, is accepting Him as Christ. Once again, John sums it up: *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1).*

This is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to **Acts 16:31** – that you understand His true Person and roles. We believe He is God – Lord. We believe He was truly incarnated and lived as a man – Jesus. We believe He is our only Saviour and our Risen Lord – Christ. This is the biblical identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. How important that we get this right! God will not accept a mistaken identity as an excuse for unbelief. We are to receive the Christ of the Word.

Furthermore, we must make sure we are believing in His Person. This is why we have taken the time to emphasise the Person of salvation. Salvation is personal; it is an encounter with another being – the eternal, uncreated Lord of the universe.

Sadly, some have made the gospel into an almost mechanical process – where the Person of God hardly seems to affect the one hearing the message. God becomes indirect to the message – the agent, the offended third party, but He is no longer central. If we understand the Person of Christ, we will understand His Work, and the message of salvation.

Unfortunately, some have taught that you are to believe in His work, or trust in what He did for you – almost apart from Him. Like He is the messenger of salvation, or the agent who brings it, and you must just accept it. No. The Bible instructs us to receive *Him* – to believe on *Him* – not merely on what He did. What He did is inseparably tied to who He is – it’s part of His work as our priest. But too many people believe in His work without considering Him – and thus have an indirect, impersonal gospel that is no gospel at all.

You cannot try to absorb the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection, and somehow remain undecided about Him. You cannot somehow lay claim to His saving work, but deny Him as your Lord, as your God, as your Messiah.

Salvation is a personal encounter between the sinner and His God. The decision is not to be about “Do you want to go to heaven when you die?” but instead “What do you say about Jesus?” If Christ is the expression of God, then what you decide about Christ is what you decide about God, ultimately. Your decision to believe in Christ is essentially a decision to treat Him as He truly is. But that has a lot more weight than we give to it.

To treat Christ as He truly is, means to bow to His authority, rest fully on Him as the only means of salvation, receive Him as your life and righteousness, worship Him as God. It is to believe that He is objectively God, the Perfect Man and the Messiah, and then subjectively to receive Him as *your* God, *your* Saviour, *your* Lord.

Salvation is where you decide whether you want Christ as your life, or not – it is not where you decide if you want to use Jesus to escape hell or not. We must believe on the true Person of salvation. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe on Him – and you will be saved.