

Why I am a Christian (5)

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[0 : 0 0] There are four reasons why the message of the gospel is so life-changing, so beautiful, and draws us to commit our lives to Jesus Christ, its source, its simplicity, its sufficiency, and its supremacy. If we want a simple definition of the gospel, we can do no better than the Apostle Paul's summary in Ephesians 2 and verse 8. It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of your own doing, it is the gift of God. It's by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of your own doing, it's the gift of God.

Let this gospel be another strong reason why you today commit yourself to becoming a Christian. First of all then, the source of the gospel, the source of the gospel.

In the book of Galatians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul is urging Christians not to desert the gospel that he preached to them. And in verses 6 to 7, he writes these words of chapter 1, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you into the grace of Christ Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Not that there is another one. Did you hear what he says there? Not that there is one. There is no other gospel. There never was. There never was any other good news. Good news from God comes in one form and one alone. The gospel message that it's by grace we have been saved through faith. And then a few verses on, in verse 11 of Galatians 1, Paul is reflecting on where the gospel comes from, and he writes these words. He says, I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. It's not man's gospel.

He's talking here about the source of the gospel, and he says of it, it did not come from a man. It's not a human gospel. It wasn't something that a man sat down and invented.

It's a divinely given gospel straight from the throne of God and the cross of Jesus. The source of the gospel is from heaven. Given the message itself, it couldn't have come from anywhere else. The notion that a human being can be saved for eternal life through simple faith in Jesus Christ is not of human origin. Let me prove that. The world is full of religions, full of them. But all of them have this one thing in common. There are certain things we need to do or to be in order to gain God's approval and earn our salvation. Think about our ancestors here in Scotland who worshiped the sun and the moon. Think of Maze Highlands, Scarabray, and Stonehenge, the Picts and the Celts. They offered sacrifices at certain times of the year to appease the gods so that their ground would be fertile and that their crops would grow. Now, nothing has basically changed in human religion even down to the present day. Think of all the world religions. There are certain things human beings must do. Certain works, either moral or religious, that gain God's approval and earn their salvation. Whether that's praying five times a day on the mat to the east, or whether it's walking on one's hands and knees up a mountain in Nepal somewhere, or offering sacrifices to numerous idols while standing in the Ganges. Human religion is all about man reaching up to God, of reaching upwards by our good works to earn God's acceptance. There is no religion in the world that does not work that way.

[4 : 3 9] And this is the way that human beings think, you see. We are programmed to think this way. We tell our children, I'm glad they're all out the back, that they have to be good, or Santa Claus won't give them presents at Christmas.

In a greater way, we tell ourselves, you have to be good if you want to gain God's approval and earn your salvation.

It's law, not gospel. It's reaching up. But the Christian gospel, the good news tells us, it's not what we do which merits God's approval and earns our salvation. It's what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

It's not our good works which earn God's approval and our salvation. It's not our works which make us righteous before God.

Listen again to 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21. For our sake, God made Him, Jesus, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

[6 : 03] It's not what we do that earns our salvation. It's what Jesus has already done. It's what Jesus did by taking all our sin upon Himself and offering Himself upon the cross for us.

It's what Jesus has done by crediting to us His perfect righteousness. Human religion consists in us reaching up to God and failing.

The Christian gospel consists in God reaching down to us in Jesus Christ and succeeding. The source of the gospel comes from God Himself because no human being could ever have dreamt in a million years of the Most High God stooping down to become a man and from there dying on a cross to bear our sins.

The gospel Christians believe is not man's gospel. It comes from heaven. It's a miraculous gospel in that it would have been impossible for any human being, programmed as we are by default, to think that good deserves reward and evil deserves punishment, to have devised a way of salvation as we have in the cross.

If there is any doubt in your mind about this, consider every other world religion and see the difference. Because in them all, man reaches up.

[7 : 44] But in Christianity, God reaches down. The gospel is of divine origin. As Paul says, it's not man's gospel. Second, the simplicity of the gospel.

The simplicity of the gospel. You know, the Christian gospel is the deepest of all mysteries, such that the wisest can't grasp its details. But it's the simplest also of all truths, so that the youngest child can experience its beauty.

University degrees are devoted to such things. But ask the wisest of us all, and that wisest of us all does not include me, by the way, in what the Christian gospel consists, and they'd answer the question, they'd answer it by saying, Jesus died for me.

Jesus died for me. It is so very simple, and yet such genius. Most genius ideas are very simple.

Jesus died for me. He bore my sin and guilt on the cross, and He died to bear the punishment I deserved. Going back to our verse in 2 Corinthians, the Jesus who knew no sin, who had never sinned, the Jesus who was perfect, offered Himself to bear my sin.

[9 : 11] He bore the punishment I deserved. He died the death I deserved to die. And in return, He gave to me the perfect righteousness of His perfect life.

Such a simple message. He die, me no die. He die, me no die. These five words, He die, me no die, they encapsulate the gospel.

The Jesus who came from heaven, and is the Word of God incarnate, perfect in every way, and infinitely glorious, emptied Himself, and became the offering for our sin. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, the majestic Son of God, took my place on the cross, and died the death.

I deserve to die. He die, me no die. He has earned for us eternal life. He has earned for us adoption as sons and daughters of the living God.

He has poured out upon us His Holy Spirit. He is changing us. He has forgiven our sins. He has given us strength, hope, and purpose in life.

[10 : 23] He has turned away the sword of hate in our hearts, and filled us with the love of Christ. Instead, He die, me no die. And it's all there, at the cross.

But of course, we ask the question, what do I need to do? Because that's always the question we ask as default legalists, isn't it?

What do I need to do in order for what Jesus did on the cross to become mine? What do I need to do? The gospel of God and the cross of Jesus is the greatest gift and the greatest miracle in history, but what do I have to do to benefit from the cross?

In what great religious work do I need to engage? Or what great moral work do I need to do? A Roman jailer once asked the Apostle Paul the very same question, what must I do to be saved?

What must I do to benefit from the cross of Christ? He may have expected the kind of answers other religions would have provided him. Pray five times a day.

[11 : 39] Confess your sins to a priest. Start doing good things. Start offering to idols. We might have expected the Apostle Paul to have given this very cruel Roman jailer a long list of do's and don'ts.

Stop being such a nasty man and start being nice to your prisoners. But he doesn't. The Apostle Paul simply answers this question, what must I do to be saved? With these words.

He says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That's it. No moral or religious preparation for salvation required.

No ticks on a moral and religious list needed. Just one thing he said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the true simplicity of the gospel.

That by simple faith in the Jesus who died on the cross, we are saved. That's it. Nothing more required or needful. Nothing less possible. Faith in Jesus.

[12 : 44] Trust in Jesus. Believe in Jesus. So back in John 3.16, the most famous verse in the Bible, we read these words, For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever is good, whoever is religious, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Is that right? No. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever should believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Faith is the way we receive what Jesus did for us on the cross. Faith is the open hands into which God pours forgiveness and eternal life. Faith is the mouth of the gospel.

Now, faith is more than merely believing. That Jesus died in the cross. Faith is more than merely believing the historical truths of the Bible.

Faith is saying that for my salvation and my forgiveness and my eternal life, I will depend not on myself and my efforts to reach up to God, but I will rely entirely upon Jesus and His cross.

[14 : 03] Let me say that again. Faith is saying that for my salvation, I will depend not on myself and my efforts to reach to God as all the other world religions do.

I will rely entirely upon Jesus and His cross. It is so simple.

Again, that points to its divine origin. But it has to be simple because the truth is Jesus has already done it all for us. There is nothing left for us to do but open our hands and receive.

Receive the gift God wants to give us today, whoever we are. And some say, well, I can't become a Christian. I'm not good enough.

But you see, among all human beings, only Jesus was good enough and He says to us all, every one of us, believe in Me. That's all. And again, others say, I can't become a Christian.

[15 : 11] This is only my first time ever hearing any of this or being in church. And Jesus says to us, whether it's your first time or your millionth time, open your hands and through faith in Me, receive salvation.

And then someone else says, I need to smarten up my act before I become a Christian. I need to get my life sorted out before I become a Christian.

And Jesus says to us, listen, I'll smarten your life up for you. First, believe in Me. The gospel is so simple, isn't it?

Well, thirdly, we have the sufficiency of the gospel. The sufficiency of the gospel. You know, life's not simple. If the gospel is enough for salvation in the first place, is the gospel enough to keep us going through all the complications of our lives?

Through the good times and the bad. Through the pleasures and the pains. If the gospel is enough to get me into the kingdom of God, is the gospel enough to keep me in the kingdom of God?

[16 : 27] Perhaps, having first believed in Christ, I now need to return to all these religious lists and tick boxes, right? Well, Sir James Simpson is a name very well known in the field of medicine.

An Edinburgh doctor from the 19th century, the maternity hospital in which Art Aidan was born was named after him, the Simpson Memorial. What Sir James Simpson is best known for is the discovery and application of chloroform as the first anesthetic.

His discovery led to the saving of countless lives. Towards the end of his life, Sir James Simpson was asked, what is the greatest discovery you ever made, Sir James?

The interviewer thought, of course, that Sir James would reply, well, chloroform, of course. But without a moment's hesitation, Sir James Simpson, perhaps the greatest physician in the world at that time, said, my greatest discovery is that I have a Savior.

I have a Savior. By that stage, Sir James had been a Christian for many years, and yet he had discovered that the gospel works not just for entry into salvation, but it was sufficient to keep him in all of life's ups and downs.

[17 : 58] He never got beyond the wonder of the cross because Christians never do. All that Jesus had done for him in the cross was sufficient, more than sufficient, for Sir James, and it's more than sufficient for me.

the hope that gospel brings us, the hope Jesus won for us on the cross by defeating death, it never dies.

It gets stronger the older we get. It sustains us through all the hard times when life's a drudge. We sang rock of ages. I remember sitting at the deathbed of someone very beloved from this congregation whose dying testimony was this, someone who'd been a believer for decades.

The last words she said were these, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. The adoption as God's children that Jesus earned for us on the cross, it becomes more precious to us.

It assures us that in all the dark times of life, we're not alone. And though we may not love ourselves, our Father in heaven adores us.

[19 : 14] The forgiveness that the gospel brings becomes more important for us because though we may be trying day by day to become more holy, we know we fail and we need to go back to that cross again and again for our righteousness in Christ.

I live in Annie's land. Annie's land cross is one of the most complicated junctions in the world. Peter counted once how many traffic lights that are there.

How many are there? 113 traffic lights. When people try to find my house and they're headed out of the city in Great Western Road, I tell them, well, you go through Annie's land cross and then take the 131st traffic light, the third right.

One day I caught myself saying to someone, well, you go past the cross and take the third right. Immediately I thought to myself that in the Christian life, you never go past the cross.

The cross of Jesus is sufficient for the young and the old. We never get past the cross on which our Lord gave himself to take away all our sins. Never. Is the gospel enough to make us holy and righteous, to sanctify us and to keep us in the love of God?

[20 : 35] It is, and more than enough. And then when we get to the end of our lives as Christians, there is no more comforting voice we can hear in our declining ears than that of the person who sits by our bed and patiently tells us once again that the greatest discovery we ever made was that we've got a Savior.

The gospel is more than sufficient for us all. Well, lastly and very briefly, the supremacy of the gospel.

The supremacy of the gospel. Earlier on, I quoted a verse from Ephesians 2 which summarizes the gospel. It is by grace you've been saved through faith and it's not your own doing.

It's the gift of God. In the very next verse, the Apostle Paul continues, not as a result of works so that no one can boast. Not as a result of works so that no one can boast.

In every world religion, people try by their good works and their religious ceremonialism to reach up to God. If they do enough good, they can earn their own salvation.

[21 : 46] In these systems, salvation is earned by the person. It is not a gift of grace from God. A gift is undeserved whereas what we earn is deserved.

So we work hard and our employer pays us what we deserve, what we've earned. He does not give us our pay at the end of the week as a gift. It is because we have earned it by our hard work and skill.

If this is the way it comes, if this is the way it is when it comes to our salvation, that it's by our own good works and our religious observance, we earn our salvation, we have every reason to boast.

We can say to whatever God it is that we worship, I have earned my salvation. Look at how good I've been. Look at how often I have prayed.

We take the glory for our salvation. Not God. But the Christian gospel is so very different. Salvation is not earned through our good works.

[22 : 49] It's not about our reaching up to God. Salvation is wholly from God reaching down to us in Christ. The only thing we do is to receive, to believe.

Jesus has earned our salvation through His perfect life and His sacrificial death on the cross. We believe in Him and He freely gives us what He has earned.

We did not earn it. We received it as a free gift of His grace. Well, what does this mean? It means that none of us can take the credit for our salvation.

None of us can take the glory for ourselves. None of us can boast that we did it. It means that all the glory of our salvation goes to God and not to us. When we talk about the supremacy of the gospel, what we mean is that the glory of Almighty God is supreme in our way of salvation.

No human being can merit any, can claim any merit for his or her salvation as if she earned even the tiniest part of it. It is all of God.

[23 : 59] It's all of His grace. The glory for it all belongs to Him. He die, me no die. We did not pay the price of our sins or earn by our good works or religious observance, the approval and righteousness of God.

Christ died on the cross, not us. That's why in heaven the songs of the angels and the saints sound like this. Worthy are you, O Lord, to deceive glory and honor and power.

All the praises and worship of Christians are directed not to themselves for how good we've been and how we've earned our salvation. All the praises and worship of the Christian church are directed toward God, whose supreme grace alone has saved us.

The message is this. In human religion, the glory of God is made very small and the glory of men is made very big.

But in the Christian gospel, the glory of an almighty loving God is made very big and the glory of man is made very small. Why do any of us worship God if it's we who have earned salvation by our good works?

[25 : 21] But we haven't. God gave it to us as a free gift of His grace through Christ and we received it through simple faith. So the eternal worship of the church of Christ is directed toward God.

Robert Murray McShane was a very famous Scottish preacher, a man who understood only too well the supremacy of the glory of the grace of God and the gospel and he wrote a hymn, the first verse of which sums it all up.

When this passing world is done, when has sunk yon glaring sun, when we stand with Christ on high looking over all life's history, then, Lord, shall I fully know not till then how much I owe.

There are certain things we never tired of hearing. The Christian gospel stands head and shoulders above them all. My salvation is secure because of God and His grace.

My salvation is certain because Christ has died in my place, borne the punishment of my sin and won my righteousness. He die, me no die.

[26 : 39] Let it be the first thing we heed in the morning and the last thing we heed at night. Let it be the song of the day and the dream of the night. Its source is so heavenly.

It's so simple, so sufficient, and the glory of God reigns supreme in its message and its effect. It is a central reason why I'm a Christian today.

For without it, there would be no hope, none at all. Can it be yours too that renouncing any effort to earn your own salvation by your good works or your religious compliance, you rely wholly on Jesus and His cross, that you believe with all your heart that what Jesus did by dying on the cross to take away sin, He did for you.

Like a tired shepherd who at the end of the day leans on a shepherd's staff, will you lean today on the good shepherd, Jesus Christ.