

CHRIST ALONE

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[0 : 0 0] When I was about 15 in high school, so I'd been a Christian for about a year, I had the chance to be trained in sharing the good news of Jesus. I was trained to do a spiel, can't even have a better word, and a hundred point outline of the gospel.

There was a hundred different stories, memory verses, illustrations, points to go through. And the point was I could articulate start to finish somebody who needed to meet Jesus to would you like to become a Christian.

Now, as a side point, I'm not sure you need an a hundred point presentation. I think we can maybe do it with a few less, but it was the one that I learned anyway as a 15 year old, and it was a good one. But this presentation would always begin with two what we call diagnostic questions.

Questions that were supposed to help you figure out where the person was in terms of what they knew about God, what they were trusting in, that sort of thing. The first question was, if you were to die tonight, are you certain you would go to heaven?

And the second, it's quite morbid in hindsight, suppose you did die tonight, and you appeared before God, and he asked you, why should I let you into my heaven?

[1 : 1 7] What would you say? I remember as a teenager finding those questions really heavy, and so to try and lighten the mood, you would improv a little bit in the second question, and I'd be like, you know, suppose you did die tonight, you know, you got hit by a bus, or something like that, which didn't really lighten it, but that was my attempt to go, I'm actually asking you a really, really serious question here about life and death, something that really matters.

And on one level, these questions are really quite simple, but at the same time, they're quite profound. And I wonder for you, if I was to ask you those questions, not in front of everyone, not with everyone eavesdropping, but just we were to have a chat, and I was to ask you those questions, what would your answer be?

If I was to ask you, if you were to die tonight, how certain are you that you would go to heaven? And if you did rock up at the gates to heaven, and God's there, and he says, why should I let you in? What would your response be? See, these questions reveal a whole lot about what it is that we're trusting in. The things that we would hand over to God as the basis for letting us into heaven, but also, just how confident we are that those things are actually going to deliver.

Just how much we actually believe these things that we would present to God would be a convincing resume. These questions show us not just if we're confident, but what we're trusting in, and whether or not, deep down, we actually know that those things can come through for us.

[2 : 5 0] Now, the most interesting thing for me in this whole process was, when I couldn't find somebody to share the gospel with, to help me practice my 100 points that I had to memorize, I would make my friends sit down with me so that I could go through my big presentation.

And it was always interesting to me to hear what my friends who went to church with me would say when asked those two questions. It wasn't always the same.

On one end, you had the people who were certain that they were going to heaven, but were trusting in flimsy things. They were certain they were going to get into heaven, but they were trusting in how much better they were than most people in the world.

Or they were trusting in the fact that they'd been baptized once. Or they were trusting in the fact that their parents worked at the church. Down the other end, you had those who were uncertain, really wanted to go to heaven, but couldn't say certain, but were trusting in the unbreakable promises of God to get them there.

And then you had everything in between on the spectrum. Now, the point being that not everyone who wants certainty when it comes to heaven, not everyone who wants that kind of guarantee,

wants to be able to answer with an emphatic yes to that first question, actually gets it.

[4 : 14] And in reality, some of the people who say that they're certain probably shouldn't be. Even though God's word promises peace that passes understanding, even though God's word speaks of an immovable hope, in the passage just read out for us, in Hebrews 10, it talks about confidence to enter the most holy place.

Sometimes it's easier to talk about confidence, to talk about certainty, than it is to know it, to feel it, to believe it.

Martin Luther, who was one of the key figures in the Reformation 500 years ago, was a man who was acutely aware of God's holiness in stark contrast to his own sin.

It's said that having become a monk, he would often hog his confession opportunities and would stay in the confessional booth for up to six hours at a time to just recount as many of his sins as he could possibly remember.

He was a man who was soaking in God's word, he was studying it, he was meditating on it, and yet he was somebody who lived his life crushed by the weight of his own sin and guilt and failure.

[5 : 32] He knew that God demanded perfection and it was that unattainable goal that cast a shadow over his life.

And even having dedicated his life to being a monk, to serving God, the security he so desperately wanted continued to elude him. And he's not alone.

Maybe that's how you feel. Maybe you're doing lots of things to serve God. Maybe you're trying very hard to be the person that you know he wants you to be because you desperately want to know for certain that when you die you will get to go to heaven.

But it feels like the harder you try, the less certain you feel. Last week, Steve mentioned briefly about the sale of indulgences.

These were effectively papal pardons for sin. That is, the Pope would give these things out as a kind of pardon for the sin that you had done.

[6 : 42] And in the time of the Reformation, these had begun to be sold for money as a fundraiser for building projects and stuff like that. Effective for building projects but probably not really helpful for everyone else.

These indulgences were then subcontracted out to priests who would travel around and give people the chance to confess sin and then essentially buy forgiveness.

That's how the system worked. Now, a really key reason that something as ridiculous as that happened was what we looked at last week. That really the priests were the only ones who had access to the Bible.

Unless you had been through university and studied Latin, you had no idea what God said in his word and so who were you to argue? You just took their word for it. All you knew is that you were sinful, God was holy, God was just and you needed help.

But there's a second really important reason that this all happened. There's a second reason that we need to grasp as we reflect on the Reformation 500 years later.

[7 : 46] See, the problem that required the Reformation, the thing that needed change, wasn't the Catholic Church itself. Now, it was the context for it.

It was the place where the issue got institutionalized, but it wasn't the problem itself. The core problem was sinful people. And I'm not even talking about the active sin of the fact that they were trying, you know, to pervert the truth of God and take advantage of insecure people.

Although that's true and that was there. See, the problem then wasn't that they didn't know they were sinful. Of course they did. That's what made people insecure.

The problem was that they didn't understand just how fundamental their sin was. They didn't understand how inherent their sin was, how deeply inside of a person sin exists.

And so the solutions they would come up with, the security they would reach out for was only of a surface level, only of a superficial. And the surface level solution that the Catholic Church came up with was a thing called penance.

[9 : 03] Penance had three steps. You confess, you show contrition, and then you do satisfaction. So, you steal some bread. You confess to the priest that you stole some bread.

You be contrite. That is, you actually mean your sorry confession and you plan to not do it again. And then, you do some satisfaction, which basically means you give some money to the poor, you spend some time in prayer and fasting, you make a trip to Rome, a bit of a pilgrimage, something

like that.

Essentially, your ledger with God is in the negative, so do some good stuff to get you back in the positive. That was the answer. And there's some logic to this system.

There's even some rightness in it. I mean, confession is a good gift from God. You don't need a priest, but confession itself is a good thing because it reflects that we're understanding sin is actually serious.

You've actually got to do something with sin. It needs to be dealt with. Contrition, of course. You've got to be genuine when you confess. You can't just say the words and not mean it. We want to be genuine in seeking God's forgiveness.

[10:11] And even the idea of satisfaction, that third bit, the idea that having done something wrong towards God, there should be some payment or some restitution, makes sense.

But when the payment that you owe God for sin is something trivial like money, or something temporary like a few hours fasting, or a trip to St. Peter's in Rome, all it shows is that we haven't really understood sin at all.

We haven't actually understood how big an issue it is, how close to us it is. It's just a thing that's been done and so it's a good thing that can be done to balance it out. It's just a superficial solution. And the result back then was a church full of petrified people. People who are aware that they were sinful, they knew that, but they are imprisoned by these temporary, ritualistic, resource-based solutions.

Their forgiveness at any given moment, their security to say, I'm certain I'm going to be in heaven, was only ever partial. And in some cases it was limited to how much money they had to buy that forgiveness.

[11:34] And so the answer for the average churchgoer back then to that second diagnostic question would have been about how many indulgences they had, how many trips to Rome they'd made, how much money they'd given to the poor, how many times a week they were fasting and praying, which was such an inadequate answer.

Even the church knew it was an inadequate answer, they invented a theology of purgatory.

Purgatory essentially exists as the place, they believe, the place between this life and heaven where you settle the accounts that you didn't have a chance to settle in this life.

So it's like, here's our solution. Do good stuff to make up for your bad stuff, but you'll never be able to do enough good stuff, so we're going to invent another space that the Bible doesn't talk about where you can keep doing good stuff.

In some cases they thought people were going to be in there for thousands of years trying to catch up for all their bad stuff because their solution was inadequate. See, on one level they knew it and yet this was the cycle, this was the trap, this was the prison that people lived in, a prison of fear. And then, while soaking in God's word, the reformers saw Jesus, saw him for who he really is, saw him for what he had actually done, saw him for what he was doing and is doing even now and it changed everything.

[13:10] Now it's not that the Catholic church back then didn't believe in Jesus, it's just that they weren't seeing him clearly enough. They weren't seeing him the way he's revealed himself in his word.

Even now today it feels like when we say we believe in Jesus we need to clarify that because it's almost not enough because lots of people say they believe in Jesus but they don't all mean the same thing.

I've had people come to my house and knock on my door, Mormons, you know, white shirts, name tags and they try and convince me they believe in Jesus and I try and explain to them that the Jesus that you believe in is not the Jesus that the Bible talks about who I believe in.

Sometimes just to say you believe in Jesus is not enough. If you desire true salvation, if you desire the kind that gives peace and security and purpose and direction then you need to know who Jesus really is.

you need to know what the Bible says about Jesus because it all stands or falls on Jesus.

Everything. And so we need to look to the ultimate source of authority, the place that Steve took us last week, the place that the Reformers went 500 years ago, the place where God promises to speak to us in His Word to us, the Bible.

[14:36] So what does it say? Well, quite a bit. Every page is about Jesus. But let's look at two specific things in this passage from Hebrews 10 that the Bible definitely says about Jesus that we

need to grab.

First one. Jesus does what you can't. So again, Jesus does what you can't.

He's perfect. perfect. This has been the issue since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Since the moment where Adam and Eve decided that they knew better than God and they were going to do things their own way, God is pure and perfect and He demands the same of His people.

And so from that point in time, there has been this gap that no one of us has ever been able to bridge. And that gap is essentially perfection. perfection. That's what God requires.

That's the standard He expects. That's what He's asking for. So before Jesus came, God provided His law with sacrifices and rituals and there was contrition and there was confession and all those bits were in there.

[15 : 46] But even that was never going to fix this issue. I mean, have a look at Hebrews 10 verse 1. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

For this reason, it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to worship.

Can't do it. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once and for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

None of it made anyone perfect. This huge chunk in the Old Testament which tells Israel exactly how they should live, which tells them exactly how they should worship, which tells them exactly how they should gather, none of it made anyone perfect.

[16 : 49] And that's what needs to happen. If people are going to be certain about heaven, if people are going to know God, if people are going to have a relationship with Him, the issue is they're not perfect and so the solution is they need to be made perfect.

That's the core issue. That's why we fumble with that first question. That's why that word certain makes us feel so uncomfortable because anyone with even the slightest bit of self-awareness knows that perfect is not them.

And so we feel uncomfortable because God does require that. And even if the sacrifices that He describes in the law had been able to pay for past sins, which they couldn't, but even if they had been able to do that, if they were able to wipe the slate clean, it doesn't change the fact that people are sinful.

That sin runs deeper. So even if we could do the sacrifices and wipe the slate clean, as soon as it's clean, we've already dirtied it again. As soon as the accounts to zero, we've already started accumulating debt again because it's us who are sinful.

Sin comes from within us and so something else is needed. A better solution is required. Therefore, verse 5, Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said, Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

[18 : 24] With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God.

First, He said, sacrifice and offerings, burnt offerings, and sin offerings you do not desire, nor were you pleased with them, though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then He said, Here I am.

I have come to do your will. He sets aside the first to establish the second, and by that will we've been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Jesus came to do what we couldn't. Jesus came to provide the perfection that was required. He came to do the perfect obedience that we were falling short on.

Verse 9, Here I am. I have come to do your will. Perfect obedience was required, and in Jesus, perfect obedience was provided.

[19 : 27] The only place anyone will ever find the perfection that God demands of them is in Jesus, in his perfect life, in his perfect death.

In fact, that's the whole reason he came. Now, let me just slow down here for a second. Jesus didn't come to be perfect for you because it was difficult and he wanted to make it easier.

he didn't come because you were close and you would have got there eventually, but he just wanted to help you along. Jesus does it because it's impossible for you to do it.

There is no chance that anyone could ever make this standard. Isaiah tells us that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags before God.

that our best attempts are almost offensive to him. And yet sometimes we treat Jesus and his perfect obedience like it's the top up for our almost perfect obedience.

[20 : 45] We don't see him as the solution to our impossible problem. We see him as the icing on our pretty reasonable cake. But the Bible says about Jesus that he's doing what we couldn't do.

He's the only perfect one. That's the first thing. The second thing is that Jesus takes what you deserve.

Two things are needed if we're going to grab hold of this perfection that we need to. we need this new perfect record that Jesus has established by living a perfect life but we still need to deal with the consequence of our sin.

We still need to deal with the right judgment that God has for the times that we ignore him and dishonor him and don't love him the way he deserves. But Jesus takes that as well.

verse 10 by that will we've been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins but when this priest Jesus had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

[22 : 24] One sacrifice sufficient for all sins past present and future the perfect son of God the innocent son of God killed in the place of guilty ones killed in our place peace.

The prophet Isaiah describes it vividly in chapter 53 it says surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering yet we considered him punished by God stricken by him and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed we all like sheep have gone astray each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all Jesus death on the cross was the once for all sufficient payment for sin it was the one time payment that keeps the debt at zero no matter how many times you stuff up it removed every possible barrier between us and God and replaced those barriers with the perfect obedience of Jesus it's what we sometimes call the great exchange Jesus takes what we deserve he takes our wrath he takes our judgment he fully satisfies God by dying in our place and then in exchange he gives us his perfect report card he gives us his perfect obedience and now he can sit at the right hand of God in heaven guaranteeing that his life lived for us his death died in our place makes it possible for people like you and me to hear the words that should be reserved just for Jesus words like this is my son whom I love and with him I am well pleased this is my daughter whom I love with her I am well pleased

Jesus is the only place where sinful people can find hope he's the only chance that we have to know the perfect God of all creation as our heavenly father Christ alone can do what is needed Christ alone does what you could not and takes what you deserve and that's why Acts 4 says salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved the issue for many of us when it comes to being able to answer that first question with a confident yes comes back to that system of penance confession is a good and right response when God shows us that we're not the people we need to be contrition is a necessary part of that genuine confession but it's the satisfaction bit where we go wrong satisfaction needs to happen but the only satisfaction that leads to assurance is trusting in the satisfaction that Jesus has done trusting in the payment that Jesus has made for our sin there's a chance that if you're somebody who doesn't feel particularly secure when it comes to heaven if you're somebody who struggles with the certainty that God speaks of in his word and promises is available through his son there's a chance that you're doing the confession bit maybe you're doing the contrition bit but it's when it gets the satisfaction that you're tempted to do maybe Jesus and yeah

I trust Jesus but I feel the need to do a bit of the work myself the only place you're going to find certainty is him because the only place you're going to find perfection which is what is required is him and all you do when you try and add to his perfection is dilute it you unperfect it if you're somebody in this room who is not following Jesus if you're not a Christian if you're not somebody who has gone through that process of recognizing that you need God's help if you're ever going to know him you need his help if you're ever going to be in heaven if you're not somebody who has asked for the forgiveness that Jesus purchased by dying on the cross in your place I want to tell you

that the offer of forgiveness the offer of certainty of hope of peace is there for you right now tonight because Jesus has done what you cannot do he has taken what you deserve and he is offering to forgive you to restore you and to begin the work of preparing you for heaven here's the question we need to finish with does this still matter surely you know we're a bible believing church this was a drastic discovery 500 years ago but we know it's

[28 : 22] Christ alone I mean Steve even mentioned it last week you might be really clever and even be able to say solus Christus which is what the reformers would have said so surely we don't need to cover this we know Jesus is the only way we can be saved we talk about this every week at church was this really worth 27 minutes of our time well maybe why did why did what the entire church in the 15th century who knew what God had done in Jesus on the cross end up so fatally misled why do you and I need to hear this the answer is sin it was the problem then and it's the problem now we need to understand that the issue here is not that it's confusing God has laid it out he said trust in Jesus just pick up this solution it's here

I've done all the work it's right there just take it and yet our default setting is to not do that our default setting is to take what God has idiot proofed for us and make it not work our default setting is to hear God say I love you in spite of who you are and then feel this need to be somebody who's worthy of God's love our default setting is to move in the opposite direction of the certainty that God has offered by doing what you can't and taking what you deserve and sending his son to die in your place on the cross we need to be reminded that it's only in Jesus because when I asked you at the beginning of this whether or not you're certain you're going to heaven most if not all of us were hesitant about the word certain that's what

Jesus offers and so we need to come back now we need to recognize that this is a battle going on in our hearts and that salvation is only found in Jesus not in the extra ministry that you're doing not in your incredible godly character even though that might be true Jesus is not the top up he's the exchange he's the substitute and in him and him alone can we find certainty certainty is the debt that we owe to the protestant reformation the possibility of assurance and security in Jesus was all but lost prior to the reformation but thank god 500 years ago some people opened their bibles and rediscovered it rediscovered security and peace forgiveness grace hope love and all of it in Jesus alone and only in Jesus alone Jesus has done what you cannot he has taken what you deserve and he invites you to rest securely in that heart and there you know