

When people meet the Christ, they forget themselves and their gods (whoever and whatever has been given the exalted place(s) in their lives) and their illusions. The colors of this world, with its gods, will fade against the brilliance and beauty of the Man Jesus. The immoral woman at the well, to whom Jesus revealed Himself, left her waterpot, forgot herself by returning to the city, and could not help but speak of the Christ she could not get out of her mind. The defiled man to whom Jesus revealed His power in the cemetery tried to get into the boat with Jesus, literally begged Jesus to let him go with Him, and finally departed to his city unable to stop speaking about Jesus to others. The dishonest tax collector, when visiting with Jesus in his own house, was so affected by Christ that he volunteered to repay fourfold all those he had cheated. Believers boldly told others about Jesus in the face of arrest, imprisonment, beatings, and even death; Christians became sacrificially generous with their resources, in meeting the physical needs of others, and extended loving hospitality by opening their homes; converts to Christianity lovingly embraced those of other races and nationalities and cultures whom they had once despised; a runaway slave, who had apparently stolen from his owner, became a Christian and returned to his master, as a testimony to the slave holder, of his new-found love for Christ! Again and again and again it happened. People's lives were radically changed when they met Jesus.

*Saved.* It is a grave error to believe God is pleased with us just as we are. To be made to feel good about ourselves, as we are challenged to awaken *our* hibernating potential, realize *our* inherent abilities, and investigate *our* true worth, obscures the truth. Alas, men are too easily drawn to "motivational speakers" masquerading as "ministers of the gospel". Men are too readily swayed by flattery, of which we are repeatedly warned against by God's Word. Men should not believe a message built upon a foundation of "how wonderful you are". This dangerously diverts attention away from the real need.

We must be keen on the gospel truth which compels us to clearly see and be broken by our sinfulness, and, at the same time, captivates us with the perfect love and purity of Jesus. The gospel which alone brings salvation (forgiveness) to the believer

must, of necessity, be a message which "wounds and then heals" which "kills and then makes alive". A change in the believer of the gospel is wrought by the same God who offers this salvation through Jesus Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 2 Timothy 3:1-15, and Titus 3:3-6 as examples)

Saving faith (belief) comes only when one is convicted of his sin and realizes he has offended God, broken His laws, and defied his Maker. Jesus Christ is preached as the only way, through His cross, that a man may be set right in his relationship with the Father. Men are called to *turn from* their sins (repent) and *turn to* Jesus alone in faith (believe). The true believer's life must be changed.

Jesus is called the Saviour because it was for the very reason of saving people from their sins that He was born (Matthew 1:21, Luke 1:77). Jesus declared this to be His mission as determined by the Father who sent Him (Luke 19:10, John 3:17). God is just and in keeping with His justice must punish sin. God has made a way for men to be freed from their deserved punishment and still be just in His forgiveness. A blood sacrifice is required, which was accomplished through Jesus' death on the cross, to atone for men's sinfulness. Through Jesus men are saved – which means they are reconciled to God and thereby avoid His wrath and the penalty of their sins (John 3:36). It is because of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross that God is just in allowing true believers to be pardoned and receive salvation. Romans 5:8-9 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

We turn our attention again to the jailer. He believed, was saved, and evidenced a changed life in his affectionate treatment of Paul and Silas. He was undoubtedly transformed by the good news of the gospel (Acts 16:33-34).

Have you believed in Jesus Christ and received salvation from your sins? How has this belief changed your life and made you a different person?

Robert Smith

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## THE "GOOD LUCK" GOD

*Or*

### *What It Means To Believe*

And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

-Acts 16:30-31

The jailer, who was prepared to commit suicide, thought better of it because of Paul's call to stop. Not only did the jailer halt his planned suicide but Paul's alarm over this rash act caused him to consider death seriously. The jailer gave pause and became overwhelmed by thoughts of where death would take him and what would become of his soul. A series of events had taken place earlier in the marketplace which caused Paul and Silas to be arrested and brought to this prison. In the prison they sang and prayed as others, who were incarcerated there, listened. During the night there was an earthquake which shook the prison and awoke the sleeping jailer. This shocking event, and the unusual circumstances surrounding it, allowed Paul and Silas to gain the jailer's complete attention. None of this was by chance, but was a whole series of connected events used of God to bring the message of salvation to this man.

The jailer was prompted to ask the most important question that could ever be raised by man and the right prisoners had been placed under his care. They had a ready answer! We will examine their answer.

*Believe.* Any message that is not believed is of no value to the hearer. If it is dismissed as false or unbelievable, the statement has no worth and is considered useless. For the gospel to be effective it must be believed and accepted as fact. Believing in Jesus and His work on the cross is absolutely necessary for salvation, but we must go further. It must be understood that the belief spoken of here must be much more than mere agreement with facts. To simply

agree with the reality of the historic death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the belief required for salvation. Surprised!?

“Saving belief” must be different. This kind of belief is supernaturally revealed and bestowed by God (Ephesians 2:8, John 1:12-13); this is belief, unlike that of the demons, which results in submission to Christ (James 2:19); this is belief which transforms your mind (Colossians 3:10, Philippians 2:5); this is belief which offers solutions to the human struggle (2 Timothy 1:7); this is belief which gives the believer a completely new identity (John 1:12-13, Galatians 3:26); this is belief which leads to obedience (John 14:15, I John 5:3-4). In short, “saving belief” is belief that *changes* a person (2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 12:1-2).

It is not enough to profess belief in Jesus Christ, or identify oneself as a Christian, without living a changed life as a result. There must be a credible answer given to the question, “How has my belief changed me?” or “How has my belief made a difference in my life?” True faith, not just an understanding of facts or agreement with the facts about Jesus, must, of necessity, change a person.

*Jesus.* It is important to emphasize that complete confidence must be put in Jesus for salvation. The gospel message is not the cross of crucifixion in isolation from the person of Jesus. Forgiveness from sin is found in the *person* of Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished for sinners. It is because of His perfect life, His suffering and death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead that salvation is available for those who repent.

Hell and the terrors of damnation are real and to be feared, but the strongest motive for repenting of sinning against God is love for the sinless Son, who hung and bled on the cross. We must be humbled by His unmatched supernatural love and should not hesitate to bow before Him, in complete submission, as our Lord. This Jesus is “altogether lovely”. We cannot help but be drawn to Him. We are compelled by our need, our sin, our hopelessness, our unworthiness to fall before His perfection and receive His kingly pardon. Without His salvation and His lordship over our lives, we are truly “undone”.

Once, when out-of-town on vacation, I met an Indian hotel manager who identified himself as a Hindu. As we stood outside, embraced in religious conversation, while he enjoyed a cigarette, I was surprised to hear him affirm belief in Jesus. He had no problem believing Jesus lived as a man and had died on the cross for sinners. He had absolutely no problem accepting this as true. He went further to openly declare that he prayed to Jesus. In confusion, I asked him again if he was indeed a Hindu. He saw no contradiction in being a Hindu and believing in Jesus, even praying to Jesus. Becoming more and more puzzled, I asked how this could be. He cleared it up for me by explaining that he believed in many gods, like Shiva and Vishnu, and had added Jesus to the list when he learned of this deity.

I explained that Jesus declared Himself to be the only way to salvation and we are not to call upon the name of any other god. He declared Himself to be the only true God, with all others being false. The Hindu had never read the Bible (although Gideon Bibles were in all the rooms of the hotel and stacked in a closet immediately behind him) and was surprised to learn of this claim about Jesus. He asked me where it said this in the Bible. I took him to places like Philippians 2:9-11 and read: “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”, John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” and 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.”

The Hindu said he’d never heard this message. He had never heard the gospel, which affirms Jesus as the only true God, and the necessity of rejecting all other gods and worshipping Jesus alone. I encouraged him to read the book of John and learn of Jesus’ life and message.

That evening I struck up a conversation with this man’s daughter when passing through the hotel lobby. The pretty Indian girl was sitting behind the

front desk painting a picture on canvas with a brush. It was large and colorful with orange and red and yellow predominating. A giant overweight figure with the head of an elephant and the body of a man, surrounded by lit candles on large candlesticks, was portrayed. The young artist was nearly finished with the impressive painting, which looked to me like a cartoon character. The young Hindu identified this depiction as one of her gods – Ganpati, the god of good luck. This was her favorite Hindu god and, upon completion of the painting, it would be hung in her room at home. She worshipped and prayed to Ganpati. Since I had never heard of her god, the young Hindu happily identified him as the son of Shiva.

The daughter was pleased to talk of her religion. She had been taught of these gods by her grandparents in India and did not question their existence. Although she could point to no proof in her life, by answered prayers or experiences, nor had she read the Hindu Sacred Writings or the Bible, this did not bother her. When I tried to make intellectual arguments or appeal to the Bible she was unconcerned with truth. She revealed a similar mind as that of her father – the young woman was being true to her heritage and culture. Like her father, she believed in Jesus and prayed to Jesus. He was one of her gods who she held in high regard for his death on the cross. Also, since she had attended Catholic school, she was pleased to impart adoration to Mary and prayed to her as well.

Sadly, there are many professing Christians who desire Jesus for “good luck” and not for a changed life. Many are told to “try Jesus” as an appeal to have wants satisfied. It is as if we are called to put Christ to the test and not, conversely, have ourselves tested against Him (2 Corinthians 13:5). Jesus is too often thought of as simply a friend who will cheer us up when we’re sad, soothe us when we’re troubled, and encourage us when we lack confidence...And, if that is not good enough, He will give us a greater measure of affluence and comfort and success and health than we’ve previously enjoyed. This is the kind of “good luck” sought by many and expected to be received through faith in Jesus Christ.

The truth about Jesus is much different than this picture of him as a personal “good luck god”.