

## **“THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST”**

### ***“The Gospel Is Good News”***

#### **Scripture Reading – I Corinthians, 15:1-11**

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*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

*For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

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*[Paul said,] “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”. When they [the Greeks in Athens] heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject”.’*

**Acts, 17:30-32, NIV**

This series is based on the book ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST AND THE PURPOSE OF LIFE’.

Two years ago, Mel Gibson’s film THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’ debuted amidst media hype, audience participation and bitter controversy. Whilst critics scorned, denounced, and dismissed the work as a piece of narrow-minded religious propaganda, Christians wept aloud and openly in cinemas across the country and around the world. Some used the film as an evangelistic tool to enable them to show their non-Christian family members and friends how Jesus had suffered for their sins. Many reports told of people being saved in their cinema seats.

*This series, ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’, gives us opportunity to discover what the Bible says about the life, death, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus...*

## **“THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS”**

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The word ‘GOSPEL’ literally means ‘GOOD NEWS’.

It is the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The best news this world ever heard came from a graveyard outside Jerusalem when the angel spoke to the bewildered women who went to tend to the body of Jesus.

*“Don’t be alarmed”, he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”*

**Mark, 16:6, NIV**

### **What do you want first: the Good News or the Bad News?**

The Gospel is good news simply because there really is the possibility of bad news. It is only when we hear the extent of the bad news that we can fully appreciate the good news. The bad news of our condition that makes the Gospel such good news is found in Paul’s words ‘CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS’.

### **People today do not like the idea of sin.**

The Evolutionist says we have not had adequate time to develop properly. Give us enough time and we will stumble upward and be all right. The Geneticist says the problem is in the genes and chromosomes. Maybe we can make some designer babies and do away with sin. The Sociologist says that the problem is the environment, and people will change. The Educator says that the problem is ignorance. If we can just provide everyone with quality education, people will be enlightened and will stop behaving badly.

### **All these approaches deal with what we lack, but the problem is what we have.**

Our hearts are infested and corrupted by sin. That sin brings debt, defilement, and domination. We are in debt because Heaven has sued us for damages and we have lost, so we are in debt to a holy God. Sin also brings defilement, because the problem is not only what we have done, but what we are. We are sinners by nature as well as by choice. Therefore sin brings domination. It rules over us in our natural state so completely that we could not choose the right way even if we wanted to.

*This is the bad news – the very bad news – of sin...*

Because sin is so bad, only the Gospel can bring such very good news.

*‘For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.’*

**I Corinthians, 15:3-4, NIV**

### **Paul considered that the Gospel is ‘OF FIRST IMPORTANCE’.**

The Gospel is the most important message that the church ever proclaims. Whilst it is good to be involved in social action and the betterment of mankind, there is no reason why these ministries should pre-empt the Gospel. The Gospel is the main thing because no matter what else you do, if you don’t get the Gospel right you have missed it all. The key to preaching is to keep the main thing the main thing. That main thing is always the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

***What do we need to keep in mind to make the Gospel ‘of first importance’ to us?***

## 1. THE SCRIPTURAL CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

*‘For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.’*

*1 Corinthians, 15:3-4, NIV*

Paul declared that the Gospel is ‘OF FIRST IMPORTANCE’.

The Gospel is the most important message the church ever proclaims. ‘CHRIST DIED... HE WAS BURIED... HE ROSE AGAIN... HE WAS SEEN’ are the basic historical facts upon which the Gospel stands. ‘CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS’ is the theological explanation of the historical facts. Many people were crucified by the Romans, but only one ‘victim’ ever died for the sins of the world.

Paul declared that the Gospel is ‘ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES’.

Of course, the Scriptures in Paul’s day were solely the Old Testament Scriptures. It reminds us that the Gospel is not an afterthought or an emergency solution to an unexpected problem that arose. The Old Testament had prophesied the truth of the Gospel. In its pages, we have clear and unequivocal teaching concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**The Cross does not appear in the Old Testament.**

The cross was invented by the Romans, who ruled Israel in Jesus’ day, as an instrument of torture and death. The Jews practised execution by stoning, not by hanging someone on a cross of wood. Nonetheless, God revealed to some Old Testament prophets that the Messiah or the Redeemer would come and give his life as a ransom for sins. They did not know exactly the manner of his death, but they were aware that it would be brutal in nature.

**King David’s prophesy in Psalms, 22 is remarkable in its detail.**

Although David had never seen a crucifixion, by the Spirit of God he was able to foretell the means by which Jesus was nailed to the cross. It is doubtful that David fully understood what he was writing, but he did not have to. Those standing at the foot of the cross as Jesus was executed could not understand everything that was going on either. You cannot help but wonder if the psalm was written by someone who was actually standing at the foot of the cross as Jesus was crucified. Such is the accuracy of detail that we are forced to conclude that the writer was a prophet who had been given supernatural knowledge of what was to come.

### JESUS’ DEATH DEALS WITH THE DEBT OF SIN

‘CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES’

**According to God’s Word, sin demands the death penalty.**

Someone has to die for sin. We will either trust in the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, or we will pay for them ourselves by suffering the eternal death of hell. The death of Jesus was necessary to deal with the debt that our sin had incurred against the uncompromising righteousness of a holy God. The death of Jesus was a blood sacrifice and atonement for sin. Nothing can wash away our sins but the precious blood of Jesus.

*‘Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.’*

*Isaiah, 53:4-5, NIV*



### JESUS’ BURIAL DEALS WITH THE DEFILEMENT OF SIN

‘HE WAS BURIED’

**Why did Paul include the burial as an essential part of the Gospel?**

One reason is that we would know for certain that Jesus really was dead.

THE SWOON THEORY: JESUS DID NOT DIE ON THE CROSS, HE ONLY FAINTED.

The theory is that Jesus fainted on the Cross and because his legs were not broken, he escaped death and was revived by the coolness of the tomb. Shaking off the effects of beatings, the tremendous loss of blood during his scourging and crucifixion, and suffering a spear wound near his heart, Jesus carefully unwrapped his own grave clothes, single-handedly moved a stone that weighed almost two tons, overpowered an attachment of Roman guards, and kept running around Israel always one step ahead of his disciples.

**It is easy for us to forget that people touched the dead body of Jesus.**

Those who claim that Jesus did not die on the Cross conveniently forget that those who took him down from the Cross tended to his body and placed him in a tomb. A number of people touched his lifeless body. If Christ had only fainted, he would still be breathing and he would still have a pulse, but no one who tended his body noticed any sign of life.

**Jesus was buried to show how God dealt with the defilement of sin.**

Just as Jesus’ sinless body was buried in the grave, so our old sinful nature was buried with him. When a dead body is buried, the defilement of that corpse is buried with it. Paul used the practice of baptism to paint a picture how we die and are raised with Christ.

*‘If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.’*

*Romans, 6:5, NIV*



### JESUS’ RESURRECTION DEALS WITH THE DOMINATION OF SIN

‘HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES’

**Jesus’ resurrection deals with sin’s domination.**

If all Jesus did was to pay my sin-debt and put my sin in the grave, I am still left with me – and I am not changed. Jesus rose again to save me from the domination as well as the debt and defilement of sin. Christ’s resurrection power gives you and me the power to overcome the enslaving power of sin.

*‘Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.’*

**Romans, 6:4b, NIV**

**The resurrection was God’s stamp of approval upon Jesus Christ.**

Someone has called it ‘GOD’S RECEIPT’, proving that our sins are taken away. When we go shopping, we are handed a receipt that shows the date, time, goods purchased and price paid. The receipt is proof of payment and identifies ownership. When God raised Jesus from the dead, it is proof positive that he approved of what his Son had accomplished.

**We serve a risen Saviour.**

Many false messiahs and religious leaders have come and gone. Anyone can claim to be God, but the difference between every false god and Jesus is that Jesus IS ALIVE! Buddha lived and died and is awaiting God’s judgement. Confucius lived and died and is awaiting God’s judgement. Mohammed lived and died and is awaiting God’s judgement. Jesus lived and died and ROSE AGAIN and will meet out that judgement.

**Before we move on let’s do a little Greek grammar study.**

When Paul writes that Jesus ‘DIED’ and ‘WAS BURIED’, it means something that was done once and for all; it is finished with. When Paul writes that Jesus ‘WAS RAISED’ it literally means that Jesus WAS raised from the dead, he still IS raised, and he ALWAYS WILL BE raised. Jesus died – and that is finished; Jesus was buried – and that is finished; Jesus rose again – and HE IS ALIVE for evermore.

## 2. THE SAVING INTENT OF THE GOSPEL

*‘I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.’*

**I Corinthians, 15:1-2, NIV**

**What is the intent, the purpose of the Gospel?**

### **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL AND BE SAVED**

**Some think they can be saved by their sincerity.**

They say: It does not matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. But sincerity is not enough because whilst you can be sincere in your belief, you can still be sincerely wrong. For example, Sulphuric Acid (H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) and Water (H<sub>2</sub>O) are both clear and odourless liquids, but if you drink sulphuric acid rather than water, even if you are sincere in thinking that the acid is water, you will end up sincerely dead. Someone wrote a little poem: ‘Poor Willie, he’s gone from us. His face we’ll see no more. For what he thought was H<sub>2</sub>O was H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>’. Some of the most sincere people on earth are sincerely and deliberately walking straight towards hell.

**Some think they can be saved by their sentiment.**

There are those who seem to think they can cry their way into heaven. They weep whenever some religious song touches their emotions or they weep when they hear a sad story from a preacher. They may even weep over their sins, but unless that emotion is accompanied by true repentance, it is not enough. No one is saved because they are simply sentimental.

**Some think they can be saved by their service.**

They are working themselves towards exhaustion in an effort to please God and earn their way into heaven. They think God keeps a record of all their good and bad deeds, and they will go to heaven if they have more ticks and stars than crosses and black marks. All that service apart from salvation will ever get you is a eulogy at your funeral, a plot in the local cemetery, and eternal separation from Christ.

**Paul wrote: ‘BY THIS GOSPEL YOU ARE SAVED’.**

There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel tells us plainly and simply the truth about how to be saved. The Gospel is not so simple that few will get up to it. It is so simple that few will get down to it.

*‘I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.’*

**Romans, 1:16a, NIV**

### **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL AND BE STRENGTHENED**

**Paul wrote: ‘BY THIS GOSPEL YOU ARE SAVED’.**

The Gospel is not only strong enough to get you to heaven, but is able to keep you strong in Christ until you get there. The words Paul used are in the present tense, which signify a continuous action. In other words, your salvation is saving you today as much as it did the day you first received Christ.

*I HAVE BEEN SAVED from the penalty and the pollution of sin.*

*I AM BEING SAVED day by day from the power of sin because the Gospel is ‘THE POWER OF GOD’.*

*I WILL BE SAVED someday from the very presence of sin when Jesus returns to take me home to heaven with him.*

**Jesus Christ is saving me and strengthens me day by day.**

Think about it. If Jesus was not my security now and forever, then the devil or someone else could come along and steal my salvation from me. No matter how long or short ago you asked the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and life, he will save and keep you within his love. You never have to worry about whether you can live the Christian life. You cannot. No one can! Nobody has ever lived the Christian life except Jesus Christ, and he will live it in and through you. Salvation is a crisis experience when we trust in Christ, but that crisis is followed by a process as he pours his life into us day by day.

### **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL AND BE SECURED**

**'BROTHERS, I WANT TO REMIND YOU OF THE GOSPEL I PREACHED TO YOU,  
WHICH YOU RECEIVED AND ON WHICH YOU HAVE TAKEN YOUR STAND'**

**I stand assured in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene.**

It is great to know that we can be saved; it is greater to know that we are saved; but greatest of all is to know that we can be saved and know we are saved and know that we are secured in Christ and so are saved for all eternity. If our salvation depended upon our staying faithful to Christ every moment, we are in bad shape. I would not want to trust the best hour I have ever lived to get me into heaven. I stand assured and secured solely by the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**What good is a salvation that you could someday lose?**

Imagine someone gave you a small key that would be easy to lose and adds the warning: This is the most precious gift you could ever be given. Hang on to it the best you can for as long as you live. It is your only way into heaven, and if you lose it, then you will be lost forever.

**I don't know about you, but I would not want to receive a gift like that.**

Some people tell us that only if we hold on to the end will we get into heaven, but the truth is that Jesus is holding us. We need not tighten our grip at all because he holds on to us safely and securely.

### **3. THE SUBLIME EXTENT OF THE GOSPEL**

***'I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.'***

***I Corinthians, 15:1-2, NIV***

**The Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.**

When Paul had preached at Athens and declared the fact of Christ's resurrection, some of his listeners actually laughed at him, but others wanted to hear more on this subject (see **Acts, 17:32**). Most Greek philosophers considered the human body a prison, and they welcomed death as deliverance from bondage. This sceptical attitude had invaded the Greek Corinthian church and Paul had to face it head-on. The truth of the resurrection had doctrinal and practical implications for life that were too important to ignore.

**Jesus not only died for our sins, but the Gospel is for all people in all places.**

***'Jesus said to his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'***

***Mark, 16:15-16, NIV***

### **THE GOSPEL EXTENDS TO EVERY PERSON**

The Gospel is for all people. God wants all people **'TO COME TO REPENTANCE'** (see **II Peter, 3:9**). He wants to save all. There is nobody that God cannot save and will not save if he or she believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and repents of sin.



### **THE GOSPEL EXTENDS TO EVERY PLACE**

**You do not have to be saved in the front of a church.**

You can be saved on a street corner, up in an aeroplane, or down in a submarine.

*'In the late 1800's, Charles Berry, an English preacher, became the pastor of the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. One day Berry described how he had come to Jesus Christ. There had been a time in Berry's early ministry when he preached a very thin gospel – really no gospel at all. As did the Corinthians, he looked upon Jesus as merely a noble teacher but not as a divine redeemer.*

*'Late one night during his first pastorate, as he sat in his cosy study, there came a knock. He opened the door and found a typical Lancashire girl with a shawl over her head and clogs on her feet. "Are you a minister?" she asked. Getting an affirmative answer, she went on breathlessly. "You must come with me quickly. I want you to get my mother in". Thinking it was a case of some drunken mother out in the streets, Berry said, "You must go and get a policeman". "No", said the girl, "My mother is dying, and you must come and get her into heaven".*

*'Berry got dressed and followed her for a mile and a half through lonely streets in the night. He knelt at the woman's side, and he began telling her how good and kind Jesus was and how he'd come to show us how to live. Then the desperate woman cut him off. "Mister", she cried, "that's no use for the likes of me. I'm a sinner. I've lived my life. Can't you tell me of someone who can have mercy upon me and save my poor soul?"*

*"I stood there in the presence of a dying woman", said Berry, "and I realised I had nothing to tell her. In the midst of sin and death, I had no message. In order to bring something to that dying woman, I leaped back to my mother's knee, to my cradle faith, and I told her the story of the cross and of a Christ who is able to save to the uttermost".*

*'The tears began to run down the woman's cheeks. "Now you're getting it", she said. "Now you're helping me." Berry concluded the story by saying, "I got her in, and blessed be God, I got in myself".'*

*We have a gospel that matches the hour,  
We have discovered the true source of power,  
Man is a weakling, but he can be strong,  
Choosing the right and refusing the wrong.  
Man has no meaning, no purpose, no soul,  
Till he discovers that God is his goal.  
This is the gospel that claims all our powers,  
This is good news for this age of ours.*

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