

How Can I Be Saved?

Lesson 2: Hope in Jesus (Part 1)

Vocabulary:

to boast	justice	illustration	over time
to deserve	system	wait a minute! (expression)	remorse
simply	consequence	to be subject to (something)	judge's bench
expression	appropriate	fool	to challenge
commitment	to murder	standard (n.)	to assure
to accomplish	to have to (do something)	in this case	conscience
burial	arrogant	to mow the lawn	deliberate (adv. deliberately)
resurrection	generation	to refuse	will
confidence	to exist	to remain	to ensure
opportunity	to come to life	bull	to seal (n. seal)
desperate (adv. desperately)	to turn around (idiom)		

Discussion

As we have been learning, the Bible teaches that God's plan of forgiveness and salvation is found in no other name than Jesus Christ. Since we are sinners who cannot save ourselves, God sent his Son, his spoken Word through Jesus, to teach us how to be saved and to die as a sacrifice for our sins. God's sacrifice of his Son shows us the love and grace God has for us, even though we are sinners:

¹ In the past, you were spiritually dead because of your sins and the things you did against God...

³ In the past all of us lived like that, trying to please our sinful selves. We did all the things our bodies and minds wanted. Like everyone else in the world, we deserved to suffer God's anger just because of the way we were.

⁴ But God is rich in mercy, and he loved us very much... ⁸ You have been saved by grace because you believed. You did not save yourselves! It was a gift from God. ⁹ You are not saved by the things you have done, so there is nothing to **boast** about. ¹⁰ God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us new people so that we would spend our lives doing the good things he had already planned for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-10, ERV)

What do we learn about salvation from these verses? How do verses 4-10 give us hope?

These verses remind us that we are all sinners who **deserve** punishment and death for our sins. But God has given us the gift of his Son through Jesus Christ. Even though we don't deserve God's forgiveness, he was willing to pay the price for our sins out of his great love! So, what is the purpose of good works or actions, since our good works and actions will never save us? They are **simply expressions** of our love and **commitment** to God, who first loved us, saved us, and brought us into an eternal relationship with him.

In this lesson, we will learn more about why our good works can never save us and how it is only through God's full payment for our sins that we can receive his forgiveness, overcome sin, and enter heaven when we die. God **accomplished** all this through the death, **burial**, and **resurrection** of his perfect Son Jesus Christ. In this perfect plan, we can have full **confidence** and hope for eternal life.

Hope in Jesus's Death

Our **opportunity** to be saved can begin the moment we see that we are sinners who **desperately** need saving. We realize that we deserve justice, not forgiveness. The Old Testament Law teaches us what **justice** is and defines it in this way: "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Leviticus 24:20).

What does this phrase mean? Give some examples of this idea in your country's justice **system**.

God is a loving Father, but part of being loving is also being just. Imagine a world without justice: a world with lazy judges who never punish people who do wrong, or a school principal who lets children hurt other children with no **consequences**. Justice is certainly a part of love. From the Bible's definition of justice, we learn that for God to be just, he must punish every sin with a punishment that matches the crime.

In our modern justice systems, we understand that we must pay an **appropriate** and just price for things we do wrong. Why is justice important? What would a world without justice look like?

At this point, we might have some questions. If justice requires punishment that matches the crime, then why do my sins deserve death if I never **murdered** anyone? Why do I really deserve to be punished in hell for my sins? Is that really just? We might also ask, "Why did Jesus **have to** die for my sins when he did nothing wrong?", or "Why did Jesus have to *die* for my sins if I never *murdered* anyone? Is God truly just?"

Think about these questions and discuss some of these issues. What are your thoughts?

The Bible teaches that a single sin brings spiritual death to our relationship with our heavenly Father because we have sinned against a perfect, righteous, and holy God. If we understand sin according to the Bible, we realize that we have not sinned once or twice in our lives, but we've sinned several times a day in many different ways! Who has never lied, gossiped, or acted in anger? Who has always forgiven and chosen to love instead? Who has never neglected a relationship or duty or failed to love a stranger? Who has continually loved God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength? Who has followed all the commands found in the Bible? If we are honest with ourselves and others, our lives are full of sin. We have rejected God's laws, his love, and his plans for us.

In this way, we have all rejected God and his very nature, which is pure, holy, and always loving. Our definition of sin is not God's definition, and he will use *his* definition of sin, not ours, to judge our lives. In other words, to think that we could stand in front of a holy God with our sin against him, present our good actions, and expect forgiveness is a prideful and **arrogant** thought. In the Old Testament, the people could not even touch the mountain where God spoke to them without *dying* because he is holy, and they were sinners (Exodus 19:12), just like we are today. Romans 3 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10, NIV), and "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (3:10). Have you ever met a perfect person? If we understand God's definition of sin, then we would all have to say, "No."

If the payment for sin is death, how then could God judge this world justly without destroying all people? His dream of living eternally with his children would come to an end within one **generation**. In I John 4:16, we find hope: "God is love." Since God is love, he *is* committed to justice, but his compassion for his children rules his heart. So, what is God to do? Sin doesn't **exist** by itself. Sin **comes**

to life through people. How then could God destroy sin and not destroy us, his sinful children? Even if he rescued us, how could he motivate us to turn away from our sin and live for what is right and good? And if we sinned less, how could he ever make us perfect when we are human and will simply turn around and sin again?

How do you think God's plan of salvation through Jesus solves these problems?

Here are a couple of illustrations to understand why Jesus is God's perfect plan for our salvation. Imagine you went to court for murder. Before you say, "Wait a minute! I've never murdered anyone!", let's look at how God sees sin:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment...And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:21-22)

According to God, what is the difference between murder and anger?

According to God's standard for judgment, have you ever sinned in a way that is equal to murder? Give an example.

Now that we understand God's definition of sin, imagine that you killed the son of a family. This family wants justice.

In this case, what would justice look like? How would you feel about this justice?

Remember our definition of justice? *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.* Justice is a level of punishment that is equal to the level of a crime. In this case, the family wants only one thing: your death. You offer to mow their lawn and provide them with food for the rest of their lives. You offer your car, your home, your services – anything for your life. But the family refuses. Why? Any payment that you offer will never bring back the son they loved. The family wants justice: life for life. According to the law, you must die.

Your mother then races into the courtroom: "Don't take my child!" she cries. "I will die instead." The judge agrees because an equal payment for your sin was made, not you but someone you loved. Justice has been served.

If this happened to you, how would you feel? What thoughts would be going through your mind?

One answer might be that you would still feel guilty for your sin. You will live, but your guilt remains because you yourself were never punished. Your own mother died instead! This was the problem with the Old Testament sacrifices: Payment was made, but the people's guilt for their sin was never removed. Hebrews 10:3 says that their guilt remained year after year "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4). These animal sacrifices had no power to make people holy or to help people overcome sin. The death of animals were just symbols of justice. Even though the people were continually reminded of their sin, over time, they continued to sin without remorse toward God.

Another animal simply paid the price. In this way, God's people were cleansed physically by **ritual**, but guilt and pride in their hearts remained (9:9-10, 13).

Now imagine that your mother does *not* come into the courtroom. You are waiting for the judge to announce your punishment: death. But the courtroom door opens, and God himself enters. He approaches the **judge's bench** and announces that he will die for your sin.

How do you think the judge will respond? Explain.

How is this situation different than you or your mother dying for your sin?

There are many answers to this second question. If God, the Creator and Judge of the universe offers payment for your sin, who could **challenge** him? Is not a judge on earth subject to the Almighty Judge of heaven? Who could say that the punishment wasn't enough or wasn't just? God's sacrifice for your sin would be the highest payment anyone could offer! The writer of Hebrews adds that God's death would be the *only* way for us to be sure that the true price of justice had been paid. Only God's sacrifice could **assure** us without doubt that we would receive his promise of eternal life, for God is faithful over and above any man (Hebrews 3:1-6). Even if you sacrificed yourself, it would not be enough. For as sinners, our sacrifice would only be like the animals – impure, unholy, and powerless. This is also why animal sacrifices are no longer needed. There is no greater sacrifice for your sin than God himself, a holy God with all authority to forgive and pay the full price for our sins.

Not only did Jesus's blood provide justice for our sins, but Hebrews 9:14 says that his blood has the power to cleanse our minds and our **consciences**. Why does this happen?

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. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... ¹² But this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins... ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:1-22)

How can Jesus's sacrifice cleanse our minds and take away our guilt? (v. 4, 14)

Do those who put their faith in Jesus ever sin again? Read verse 14 carefully.

We learn from this verse that Jesus's sacrifice cleanses our consciences not because we no longer sin, but because Jesus takes away our sin and makes us perfect in the eyes of God. Once we are made perfect in God's eyes, we never have to feel shame before him when we sin. John tells us what to do when we sin: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This verse refers to a public confession sin to another believer, not a

private confession.¹ We are exposing our sin and bringing it to light, just as Jesus taught and as James directs us to do when he says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Notice that James does not say that we need to confess to be saved. We’re already saved by faith in the blood of Jesus! But we need to continue bringing our sins to light to gain victory over them. This is part of remaining in Jesus. (John 15:2).

Hebrews 1:14 explains that even though we are made sinless in the eyes of God, we are not perfect because Jesus continues making us holy over time. We’ll talk more about how this happens in later studies, but we can be assured that Jesus’s blood has the power to take away our sin and our guilt before God, that we might live secure in his love: “¹⁷ Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more” (Hebrews 10), says the Lord. This is also why John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). What an amazing miracle Jesus does in our lives!

For this reason, the Hebrew writer also says that if we continue to sin **deliberately** after we have received this truth, then there is no other sacrifice available for our sins. No one can offer another sacrifice greater than God’s. When we accept his sacrifice, he gives us the power to turn from deliberate sin and obey his teachings. If we refuse and continue sinning deliberately without returning to God, our only option is to face God’s judgment and punishment for our sins, including the sin of continually refusing his gift of grace (Hebrews 10:26-27).

To help us understand the security of our salvation when we place our faith in Jesus and continue to trust his plan for our lives, the writer of Hebrews compares God’s plan to a **will**. A will is a document that a person writes before he dies to **ensure** that his desires, or “will,” will be fulfilled. Many people leave their money and belongings to their children or loved ones. But all of these wishes must be written in the legal document called a will. The writer of Hebrews explains that a will only goes into effect *after* a person dies, not before. In this way, God **sealed** his will for our salvation through his own death (Hebrews 9:16-22). Nothing and no one can remove what God has sealed. This is the gracious love and salvation God offers us today through Jesus. If you respond wholeheartedly to God’s great love for you through Jesus, then he invites you into an eternal and intimate relationship with him so that you might go even deeper into the love he has for you. His love for you is not transactional, it’s eternal and relational. We’ll learn more about this in future lessons!

Even though you are a sinner, how does Jesus’s death give you hope?

How do you want to respond to the sacrifice and gift God is offering you? Explain.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Write a letter to God about what hope in Jesus means to you.
2. Keep reading a chapter in the Gospels every day and spend time praying in Jesus’s name. Pray over any decisions you made today.
3. Visit the E²T² [Testify](#) page of [Connectthenations.com](#). Click *Watch a Testimony*. Go to the *Salvation* section to watch stories of people who have been saved by Jesus.
4. Complete the next study: *Hope in Jesus* (Part 2).

¹ See I John 1:9 in Martin M. Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor University Press, January 2005.