

# Jesus, the Saviour

## **Bible Reading - Ephesians Chapter 1 verses 1 to 23 (NLT).**

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

<sup>3</sup> All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. <sup>4</sup> Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. <sup>5</sup> God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. <sup>6</sup> So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. <sup>7</sup> He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. <sup>8</sup> He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

<sup>9</sup> God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. <sup>10</sup> And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>11</sup> Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

<sup>12</sup> God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. <sup>13</sup> And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

<sup>15</sup> Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, <sup>17</sup> asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. <sup>18</sup> I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

<sup>19</sup> I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. <sup>21</sup> Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. <sup>22</sup> God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. <sup>23</sup> And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

## **SERMON**

This month I felt God wanted me to talk more about His Son, Jesus Christ. And in talking more about His Son, we learn more about God's awesome love for us!

I was excited because by now you will know that when I talk here on a Sunday I focus not on what I think about aspects of our faith, but on what God's Word (The Bible) says. I knew that in order to talk accurately about Jesus I would need to return to the Scriptures and look at what it teaches us.

So what better place to begin than with the Gospels. Matthew and John walked around with Jesus – Mark and Luke wrote down their account of His life from what first hand witnesses told them and no doubt they too sat and listened at times to His amazing teaching, and observed His Godly ways.

There are so many things we learn about Jesus from the first 4 books of the New testament – I am going to focus on those which tell us something about why He came, and what we can learn about His character, in order that we can become convicted by God of those things in our own life that He would like to change for the better.

Beginning then at the beginning, we can see from the very first chapter of each of the four Gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that the chief reason Jesus Christ came to earth was to save us from our sins. In Matthew 1 v 20 we read this:

***‘An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”***

In fact the word ‘Jesus’ means ‘**The Lord saves**’. Jesus came to earth to save us all from our sins.

Mark starts His Gospel with the words ***‘This is the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.’*** In verse 21 we see that the demons knew who Jesus was even before many of the people realised. The evil spirit in a demon-possessed man cried out to Jesus – ***‘I know who you are – the Holy One of God’.***

The Holy one of God was the Messiah, the saviour of the world.

In Luke chapter 1 we read about the angel Gabriel telling Mary that she would give birth to God’s son and she was to name Him **Jesus** and that He will be called the Son of God.

As I have just said, ‘Jesus’ means ‘The Lord saves’.

Luke chapter 1 is a long first chapter and in verses 76 and 77 we read about John the Baptist’s Father singing a song of praise and thanksgiving to God, and he proclaims – ***“You, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.”***

Finally, in John chapter 1 verse 29 we read this:

***‘The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”’***

So it is that the first chapter of each of the four gospel accounts clearly tell us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to earth to save us from our sins. While he was here he did much more that we can learn from, but for now, let us consider what it means when we say, and we read, that Jesus Christ saves us from our sins...

If we were to walk down the High Street in Newport and shout out from a soap box, 'Jesus Christ saves you from your sins, repent and be saved because time is short!' What would the people think?

Well when Jesus walked around on the earth teaching and preaching, the religious community thought he was mad. The disciples on the other hand believed what He told them. John tells us in chapter 12 v 37 of his gospel:

***'But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him.'***

And when it came to His trial before Pilate the crowds called out 'Crucify Him. Release the murderer Barabbas to us instead!'

So probably, most people down in the High Street would shout back abuse and profanities, but a few might want to know more. Why is that? Well in many places in the Bible we see that not only has Satan, the devil, blinded people to the truth, but God too has also blinded some to the truth for reasons I for one do not understand. In Isaiah 6 verses 9 to 11 this is what God said to the prophet:

***'Go, and say to this people,***

***'Listen carefully, but do not understand.***

***Watch closely, but learn nothing.'***

***<sup>10</sup> Harden the hearts of these people.***

***Plug their ears and shut their eyes.***

***That way, they will not see with their eyes,***

***nor hear with their ears,***

***nor understand with their hearts***

***and turn to me for healing."***

John says in chapter 12 v 41 that ***'Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said this, because he saw the future and spoke of the Messiah's glory'***.

In the Acts of the Apostles Paul, speaking to the Jewish leaders in Rome also referred to Isaiah's prophetic word because they too would not be persuaded that Jesus was the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

So what is the problem with people, that causes so many of us not to understand that we need to be saved from sin, or indeed that there is a consequence to sin?

Well, In the Old Testament, we see in the books of Genesis and Isaiah in particular, that our iniquities separate us from God. God warned Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 2 that sin (in this case doing something God expressly forbade) would result in death. And Isaiah 59 verse 2 says ***'It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore'***.

All throughout the days prior to Christ, the Old Testament Law laid down by God via Moses was clear that those who broke certain commandments had to be killed. Adulterers were stoned to death, for example. People who worked on the Sabbath also had to be put to death.

The Jewish people had to come to the priests regularly to be cleansed from their sins by the sacrifice to God of animals on the altar, and the sprinkling of the animal's blood.

In the New Testament, after Christ shed His blood and died for our sins, it says in Romans 6 v 23, ***'The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.'***

So, firstly, many people just do not understand the penalty for sin, and secondly, most of us do not even realise what constitutes sin.

What is sin then? Oswald Chambers in 'My Utmost for His Highest' ***says 'sin is a thing I am born with and I cannot touch it'. 'The disposition of sin', he says 'is not immorality and wrong-doing, but the disposition of self-realization – I am my own god - it has one basis, my claim to my right to myself'***.

In other words (my words) sin is a thought process that goes like this. 'I am my own man (or woman), I will do what I want. If I chose to do good today, I will do good. If I chose to do harm or wrong I will do that. It's all about me and if you don't like it... tough!'

That process of thinking is actually rebellion against God. It puts 'me' above 'Him'.

And I believe that is the spirit we see in this world today – we see that disposition all around us, and throughout the world. We see it in people we hear about in the news, whether it be a war, a murder, an argument, or an opinion. The uncomfortable truth is that at times we see it in ourselves and those we love, too.

In the collected Letters of C S Lewis Volume 2, Lewis puts it like this:

***'Evil begins (in a universe where all was good) from free will, which was permitted because it makes possible the greatest good of all. The corruption of the first sinner consists not in choosing some evil thing (there are no evil things for him to choose) but in preferring a lesser good (himself) before a greater (God). The Fall is, in fact, Pride. The possibility of this wrong preference is inherent in the very fact of having, or being, a self at all.'***

Pride has many meanings as we know, but in this sense, CS Lewis is talking about the dictionary definition: 'having too high an opinion of myself' or 'arrogant or disdainful conduct or treatment of others'. Lewis says that this kind of pride is what describes the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

For me pride means 'everything revolves around me and I don't particularly care about anyone or anything else; in any event I may pay lip service but nothing - including God - is as important as me'. This is what the devil believes and wants us all to believe, in order that we get diverted from believing in God – who to a believer, of course, is an infinitely more important person than myself.

Furthermore, Chambers also says ***'The condemnation is not that I am born with a heredity to sin, but if when I realise Jesus Christ came to deliver me from it, I refuse to let Him do so, from that moment I begin to get the seal of damnation.'***

He then quotes John 3 v 19: ***'And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.'***

So, sin is basically doing what I want, not what I should, even if it is wrong; or (as it says in James chapter 4), ***'It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.'*** When we behave in these ways, we are separating ourselves from God and the more we continue to sin without confessing and repenting, the more we are heading for everlasting separation from God and towards eternal damnation.

It is only when God convicts us of this that we can see the light, turn back to Him, and can be saved from spiritual death and the damnation of our soul.

So I have now dealt with my main point. Sin is the enemy; Jesus is the solution, and all those who turn to Him and follow ***Him*** instead of self, will be saved

from damnation and inherit eternal life in both this world and the next. I believe this is what God wants us all to understand as the most important reason why he sent His son Jesus Christ to the earth!

There is so much more we can learn about Jesus just from the gospels, let alone the New Testament letters and the rest of the Bible, but in the interests of time I will pull out just some key ones. These points will tell us something about His character.

In the opening verse of his gospel, John clearly tells us Jesus isn't just God's Son, but is God Himself in the form as a man.

This is a mystery that most of us find difficult to comprehend, just like the concept of the Holy Trinity that states that along with the Holy Spirit, God is, a 3 in 1 God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a fundamental truth that we need to believe even if we don't understand it!

Next I want to remind you that Jesus was the fulfilment of apparently over 400 Old Testament prophetic Scriptures that told us what He would be like, How He would be born, and when he would come.

Because He is pure and holy, Mark and Luke record that He was born of a virgin.

The account of the angels - in Luke's gospel - announcing to shepherds, who were considered amongst the lowest of the low in those times, that the Christ had been born; and the place of His birth (an animals feeding trough or manger) took many people by complete surprise. The Jews expected the Messiah to be their King, so the actual place of Jesus' birth didn't fit comfortably with the preconceived ideas of the religious leaders of the day.

I am sure the religious experts would have expected Jesus to be revealed to them first, not the so-called lower classes. And as we know from Scripture as Jesus grew up He had something to say to them about their self-righteousness, wealth, arrogance and pride.

So, after just a chapter or two of the Gospels we see Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is God, He is pure and Holy, He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about The Messiah, the Christ -that is the Saviour of the world - and that He accepted all classes of people, with no favourites. His character is the very character of God.

Three of the Gospels give an account of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. Satan, the devil, knew Jesus was God's Son, and tries three times to persuade Jesus to worship Him instead of God.

There is a lesson here for us – we need to know that the way Jesus resisted the devil was not to try harder, not to read books for human advice, not even to pray, not to ask the Minister or Vicar, although those are all good things. Jesus resisted the devil by quoting the Scriptures to him.

**'The Scriptures say.....'** said Jesus – 3 times. In fact, this is what He said ***"The scriptures say: - 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*** and

***"You must worship the Lord your God and serve only Him."***, and finally

***"You must not test the Lord your God"***.

After those responses, the Bible tells us the devil left Him. He came back later, but He left Him.

So my first rhetorical question for you is 'How well do you know the Word of God? Can you quote it to the devil when he whispers untruths into your mind???

The more we read The Bible the better we are equipped to deal with all that the world, the devil, and sin throws at us... But remember too that whilst Satan will leave you when you quote scripture and verse to him, he will come back and try again, usually when we are off guard, tired, or irritable, so beware. Stand Firm!

In the very first chapter of John's gospel we learn that Jesus is gentle like a lamb. And later we read that He goes to the slaughter like a lamb, to save us all from our sin.

In John chapter 2 we see Jesus is a miracle worker. He turns water into wine, the first of many many miracles He performs to bring glory to His Father and show all who will believe, that He is God Almighty.

Also in this chapter we see that he had a passion for God's House and rebuked the money changers for making the temple seem like a market place.

Next we see He had no prejudices against women, who were second class citizens in those days – and clearly he came to show that all people are equal in God's sight. He spoke to and changed forever a Samaritan woman at a well, as he told her He was the Messiah.

He heals many people - such is His love for us all.

As we flick through the pages of Mark and Luke we see that Jesus spoke only the truth but He was rejected by the scribes and the Pharisees, because of it. After all, the truth hurts! But we also read that more and more ordinary people were captivated by Him and hung on His every word.

He teaches with an authority that the leaders didn't seem to have.

He teaches the people a new way of acting, overturning much that His contemporaries taught. He makes it clear that the Old Testament focus on religious rules and laws is about to be overturned because He has come to usher in God's New Testament of grace and love. Despite the New Testament or 'New Covenant' He refers to, He clarifies that the old law (the Ten Commandments) still stand. In fact in Matthew 5 it says **'He came to accomplish the law's purpose'** and that we are to **'obey and teach the commandments'**.

A pivotal teaching concerning this new way, is that known as the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, which we discussed a few months ago. His clear emphasis here was the need for love, mercy, purity, peace and humility, and also he tells us how much he cares for those who are poor of heart, or grieving. He rejects the old Mosaic law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and replaces it with His hard teaching that we are to 'love, forgive and pray for our enemies'.

We learn in Matthew 5 that God's plan is to use His people, you and me, as what Jesus calls **'salt and light'** to the world of unbelievers. Our good deeds are to shine out for all to see.

He teaches us about the importance of prayer, shares with His disciples how to pray, and later tells us that whatever we ask for in His Name will be granted.

In Matthew 7 we learn that the road to heaven is narrow, and that we must confess our sins and repent of them in order to receive salvation. He also talks about the judgement to come for those who will not believe in Him.

He sums up much of His teaching by telling us **'to do to others what we would like them to do to us'**.

In Luke 7 and Matthew 8 Jesus tells us about the importance of faith and this is repeated later in Mark, Matthew and Luke where people are healed in response to their faith.

In Mark 6 and Matthew 9 We see that it is God's plan to use willing people to do His work of teaching, preaching and evangelising. He has a plan for every one of us.

Do you know His plan for your life?

It might be something less stressful than teaching or evangelising. It might simply be the gift of hospitality or encouragement. On the other hand, He might ask you to go to some war-torn country to preach the Good News. He might even ask you to experience persecution for your faith like so many in other countries have to endure. He is looking into our hearts to see if we will do whatever He calls us to, but He won't ask us to do anything He doesn't equip us to do in His strength.

He is compassionate about us all. Twice in Matthew's gospel we see He had compassion on the people because they were confused, helpless (chapter 9) or sick (chapter 14). He wants to heal us. Throughout His entire ministry he went about healing the sick.

He is merciful towards us. 5 times in the gospel of Matthew alone, individuals asked Jesus to have mercy on them and He did. And 5 times in that same gospel He told the people to show mercy to one another.

In Matthew 17 Jesus tells us to pay our taxes.

In Matthew 22 and Mark 12 we learn He is honest, truthful and impartial.

In much of the Gospels we read about God's amazing love for us, His children. We learn in Matthew 18 how much God celebrates when one of His children makes a mistake, goes astray but then repents and comes back to God with a contrite heart.

There is probably no better illustration of how much God celebrates when one who is lost returns to Him - and receives his forgiveness and restoration - than in Luke 15 with the parable of the Prodigal Son. A story I believe we all know so well....

I am going to come to close here in the interests of time, although I have only used some of the key things from literally the first half of the Gospel accounts...

There is so much more we can find in the gospels that tell us how amazing, how wonderful, merciful, loving and gracious Jesus is. I do hope you will spend

time with God reading His encouraging Scriptures in the privacy of your own homes. It really is something you can't do too much of!

For me, the most important thing God wants us to know today then, is that if we want to live out the rest of our lives in peace and joy, then knowing Jesus and believing in Him is the key. If you want to be sure of your salvation and rest confidently in the knowledge that there is a far better place waiting for you in Heaven; where you will live eternally in the presence of Almighty God, the angels, and all believers, then that promise is for all who believe in Jesus as their Saviour and regularly confess and repent of their sins.

If when you are reading your Bibles, you remember only one Scripture, may I suggest this one, which comes from John's Gospel chapter 14 verse 6.

Jesus told his disciples, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."***

And there I close - Amen and Amen!