

GOD'S RESCUE PLAN

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In the last study we considered the fundamental problem between us and God: sin.

- How did we describe the essence of sin?

The Bible shows that sin is the root of all other human ills. The ultimate consequence of sin is death. In the Bible, death doesn't simply mean that our heart stops beating. The essence of death is separation: separation from our bodies, from each other and from God (the source of everything good) for all eternity. This is what the Bible calls hell. Unless something changes, this is our destiny. However, we've also seen that God loves us and wants to rescue us from our sin and his judgement. Like the father of two sons that we looked at in the first study, God wants us to share our lives and our hearts with him. But for this to happen, our sin must be dealt with.

This study looks at how God has made this possible. One of the authors of the Old Testament was a Jewish prophet called Isaiah. He lived 800 years before Jesus and he looked forward to the one who would come to rescue people from God's judgement by dying in our place. The following verses specifically predict the nature, significance and meaning of Jesus' death.

Isaiah 53:3-8 He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's path to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all... he was struck down for the rebellion of my people.

- How did the writer predict that Jesus would suffer?
- What would be the significance and meaning of Jesus' death?
- Because Jesus is God in human flesh, what do we learn about the character of God?

Although these words were written long before crucifixion was even invented, the similarities between Isaiah's prediction of Jesus' death and the actual event are striking! The New Testament of the Bible further explains the significance of Jesus' death.

Romans 3:19-28 Obviously, the law applies to those whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

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For everyone has sinned; we fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood...

Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

"The law" here refers to God's standards as laid out in the first five books of the Old Testament. However, the previous chapter of Romans makes it clear that the law can also refer to any awareness we have of God's standards (as, for example, through our consciences).

- What does the law do? What can't it do?
- How can we be put right with God? What's God's part in this? What's our part?
- Who's eligible for God's forgiveness? Why?
- How would you explain God's solution for sin in your own words?
- What are the implications of our acquittal being based on our faith, not our good deeds?
- What does this passage reveal about God's love?

In this passage, faith means actively trusting God and taking him at his word. The heart of the Christian message is this: God has provided a way for sinful people to be forgiven, restored to relationship with him and transformed to fulfil the eternal purpose for which he made them. The way of rescue that God has provided for us is to trust that God dealt with the problem of our sin and guilt through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection is vital to Christianity for many reasons. His dying and then overcoming death back up his claim to be God. He chose to step into our world as a man, but as God, had the power to defeat sin and death. And because Jesus is not dead but alive, we can know him and relate to him as a living person, not just as an idea.

Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. Paul, who wrote the book of Romans that we've just read from, also wrote that if Jesus wasn't resurrected, then Christians are wasting their time and are the most pitiful people alive! (1 Corinthians 15:19)

- What is new to you from this study?
- From the first four studies, how would you summarise the message of Christianity so far?

In light of God's offer of forgiveness and new life, every person is faced with a choice: receive or reject God's offer of forgiveness. This is the most important choice you can ever make. Whatever decision you make has huge implications, determining the direction of your life and your eternal destiny.

In the next two studies we'll look more deeply at this choice as well as the implications of receiving God's forgiveness and entering into a relationship with him.