

WHERE WILL YOU SPEND

ETERNITY?

By Rupert Raynar

My Dear Friend,

Can I ask you to consider the most important question anyone can ever ask: “Where will you spend eternity?” Now I put that to you because the Bible says you can know, with absolute certainty, in this life, where you will go after your death. And there’s the issue, death, for we must all face it. Every day, around the world, 260,000 people die; that’s 3 souls passing out of this life into eternity every second, and one day you’ll be one of them.

Now we know that to be true, but we still put off thinking about it, don’t we? After all, we may be young and think it won’t happen for many years, so why worry about it now. Let’s instead get on with our lives and achieve everything we possibly can here today. Or we may be old and think it is too late to change the direction we are going in. You see, it’s not wrong to have ambitions, to set goals, to want to provide for our families and our future. We may even desire to become the very best person we can possibly be. We could also add religion to our lives thinking that that is what life is all about, and that somehow going to church or trying to follow a particular moral belief system is what will ultimately fulfil us. But that still leaves the question: what will happen to me after I die, and how can I prepare for that day? As someone once said, be wrong about your career, be wrong about your marriage partner, be wrong about your pension, but don’t be wrong about where you will spend eternity.

It is here that the only way we'll discover the answer to such questions is to open up God's Word, the Bible. Benjamin Franklin once said that there were only two ultimate certainties, death and taxes. The Bible, however, goes further, the two certainties are death and judgment. In Hebrews 9:27 it says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment." That's right, every one of us will one day have to give an account of our lives to an all-holy, all-seeing, all-knowing God. In Revelation 20:12 it says, "and the books were opened ...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." In fact, what most people don't know is that the Bible teaches that there are in fact two different judgments for two different sets of people. One, the "Great White Throne Judgment" of Revelation 20, is where all those who rejected God's free offer of salvation in this life will have their sins judged (not good deeds) to decide the degree of punishment to come in a place called Hell. The other is the "Judgment Seat of Christ" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10) for those who did receive God's free gift during their lives and where none of their sins will even be mentioned. Instead, rewards will be given for faithful service, to be enjoyed for ever in an unimaginably glorious Heaven.

But note, while those rewards are earned, the Bible teaches that actually going to Heaven is totally unearned, being instead a free gift from a gracious God to those who simply trust in Jesus and are "born again". And the difference between those two groups of people, the lost and the redeemed? The first never had their sins forgiven in their lifetime unlike the second, who, though still sinful, deliberately chose to respond to the "Gospel" at one point during their lives.

Now the Gospel is good news, as I will go on to explain, and must be believed and embraced by everyone if they want to be saved. Religion, on the other hand, (and goodness knows there's enough of that everywhere, isn't there?) teaches that we need to lead a good moral life, do good works, perform certain rituals, keep certain rules – and then Heaven is still uncertain, despite a life-long struggle and effort to perform to a particular standard.

However, the Bible, by contrast, says that no amount of religion or trying to lead a good life is sufficient to enter God's kingdom. Why? Because none of it, no matter how sincerely it is practised, can cancel out a single sin, and God, who is infinitely holy, must punish sin, all sin. Instead, we need another way to be saved. We need a Saviour, we need the Gospel. And hence, that is what this letter is all about: the Gospel, Salvation, and how to receive it, for I thank God that I have a glorious good news message to proclaim.

Now, there is a common misunderstanding amongst many people, and that is the notion that if I try my hardest to lead a good moral life, if I am sincere, if I am kind and loving, if I've done enough good during my lifetime, then all will be well when it finally comes my turn to die. But that is so far from the teaching of the Bible. Instead, Scripture teaches that all of us are actually born on the broad road that leads to destruction, and that there has to be a definite time in our lives when we get off that broad road and enter by the narrow gate that leads to life. (cf. Matthew 7:13, 14) What is more, Jesus said that that narrow gate is hard to find.

So, why should that be? It's because every unsaved person thinks that he or she can work their way into God's favour and thereby His Heaven, by the good things that they do. It seems to make perfect sense, doesn't it, simply trying your best, but the Bible clearly contradicts this. In Proverbs 16:25 it says, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death." That's right, depending on leading a good life for salvation – no matter how good that life may be, or how sincerely held that belief – ends in spiritual death and Hell the Bible says.

So why should that be so if God is a God of love? Because He is also all holy and must therefore punish sin, all sin; He cannot simply deny Himself and contradict His holy nature. "But what if I've sinned only a little in my life and done a lot of good to counteract the bad – surely then God wouldn't send me to Hell, would He?" Well, what does God's Word say? It says in Romans 3:10–12: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that

understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Then in Romans 3:23 we read: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” But the Bible does not stop there. In Romans 6:23 it says: “For the wages of sin is death”, and that is not just physical death (we all die, don’t we?) but eternal spiritual death in a place called Hell. In Ezekiel 18:4 it says: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

So, there you have it: we have all sinned and are all consequently damned to an everlasting Hell. It’s grim, isn’t it? God’s standard is so high that only one small white lie told in an otherwise blameless life would be enough to damn one’s soul eternally. And if you don’t believe the Bible teaches that, read Revelation 21:8 where it says: “and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Jesus (who preached more about Hell than any other preacher in the entire Bible) said: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48). Again, in Matthew 5 (verse 20) it says: “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

So, right there, we see that the standard for entering Heaven is total Christ-like perfection from the moment we are born until the moment we die. May I ask you? “Are you that perfect?” You say, “Of course not; none of us are.” Precisely: that is why God, who is infinitely holy, had to find another way to save us, instead of accepting our good works as payment for sin, and that way was the Cross of Jesus Christ. There, on the Cross, Jesus paid the price for all our wrongdoing. In 1 Peter 3:18 it says: “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” Isaiah 53:5 says, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” That is how God demonstrates his love and why, in Romans 5:8, Paul says: “But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” In John 3:16 it

says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Again, in 1 John 4:10, John writes: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation (sacrifice) for our sins.”

Thus, all of us, and that includes the Pope and Mother Teresa, need a substitute in our place. And who is that substitute? – Jesus. Jesus led the perfect life that God demands of you and me, and He died the death we all deserve. Jesus really did do it all. On the Cross He cried out, “It Is Finished!” (John 19:30). That is: “Paid In Full!” Look at it this way. If you and I can get to Heaven by trying our best, by doing good, by religious deeds, by abstaining from sin, then why did Jesus die? No, He died because there was no other way. Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Romans 5:6 says, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

And so, because Jesus has already made a way of salvation for all of us by being punished in our place, God can now save us freely by His grace, while at the same time remaining holy, righteous and just, no matter how bad we are. In Ephesians 2:8 and 9 it says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” And in Titus 3:5 we read: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...” Then in Ephesians 1:7 it says, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

And so, if Jesus has done it all for us what must we do? Well, the Philippian jailor in the book of Acts (Acts 16:30, 31) asked that question. He cried out to the Apostle Paul and Silas saying, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” That’s it! That’s all a person can and must do to be saved – simply trust in Jesus alone from a broken, contrite and repentant heart. The trouble is most people won’t do that;

they don't see the need; they see it as foolishness (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–29 and 2:14). They say, “You're not going to tell me that no matter how wicked and vile a person is, if they respond to the Gospel and make a once in a lifetime decision to trust in Christ, they can have all their sin – past, present and future – totally forgiven for ever, receive eternal life and the assurance of Heaven when they die with absolute certainty.” But that is precisely what the Bible teaches: the unearned Grace of God received through faith alone in Christ alone. (See Ephesians 2:8 and 9).

It is this which is the good news of the Gospel, a Gospel that most people sadly never hear and which, if they do hear it, reject outright, and which even most churches do not teach. Instead, people stumble all over it, still clinging to the belief that somehow our good deeds must have something to do with our going to Heaven. But that would be a Gospel of “works” or “another Gospel” as Paul puts it in Galatians (1:6–9) “which is not another”, so much so that Paul pronounces a curse on all those who preach it. Instead, do you know what God thinks of our good works: “filthy rags”, that's right, “filthy rags!” (See Isaiah 64:6). In Jeremiah 17:9 this is what God says about the human heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” And so, a person is saved by God's unmerited favour made possible by the death of Christ, or they are not saved at all.

Next question: what does it mean exactly to “believe on” the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation? Well, it's clear from the teaching of Scripture that it means far more than just believing the facts about His life. Instead, it means to trust, in your heart, that when Jesus died on the Cross that He died for you personally. It is in your heart where you must transfer all of your trust from self-righteousness to Christ, and that trust must be alone. Romans 10:8-10 says, “the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the

heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Philip said to the Ethiopian in Acts 8:37 that he needed to “believe with all thine heart...”

Thus, because “saving faith” must take place in the heart, at the moment of conversion there will be a brokenness, a godly sorrow, an abhorrence of sin, and an admission not only of one’s guilt but also of one’s complete spiritual bankruptcy. In other words, there must be repentance, a complete “change of mind” about one’s sin, one’s self-righteousness, judgment and the way of salvation. The Greek word “metanoia” which is translated “repentance” in the New Testament, and “metanoeo” which is translated “to repent” actually means just that: to “change one’s mind;” to “think differently”; to “reconsider.” And without it Jesus said, “Ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3).

Jesus also proclaimed, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matthew 3:2), and in Mark 1:15, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Acts 3:19 says, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” And again, in Acts, (17:30): “God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”

In 2 Peter 3:9 Peter says that “the Lord is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” We also learn in Romans 2:4 that “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” As for Psalm 51, David’s psalm of repentance, in verse 17 he says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Job said (in Job 42:5, 6) “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Then in 2 Corinthians 7:10 it says, “For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...”

Then we read in Isaiah 6 how he had a vision of the living God and cried out “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of

hosts.” He was a prophet but yet he confessed his uncleanness in the sight of holy God. Peter’s response in Luke 5:8 when he first met Jesus was similar: “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” The conversion of the thief on the cross next to Jesus in Luke 23:39-43 is another classic example of heartfelt repentance and faith at conversion. After first mocking Jesus, along with the other thief (Matthew 27:44), he had a complete change of mind. He owned up to his sin and confessed he deserved to be punished. (Luke 23:39-43).

But note, too, that he did not promise anything to Jesus. Not only could he not present any good deeds or religious merit to Jesus from his past life, (he didn’t have any), he couldn’t promise to do any good in the future either. He wasn’t even able to be baptized. Instead, he was completely and utterly, helplessly and hopelessly spiritually bankrupt, and he knew it. But, when he turned to Jesus and said “Lord, remember me when thou comest into your kingdom” Jesus replied, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” In short, the thief repented and trusted; he had a change of mind; he acknowledged Jesus as Lord and he looked to Him as the Saviour for the forgiveness of his sins and everlasting life. What the thief did was to receive the free gift of salvation which Christ wants to give to anyone who comes to Him in brokenness with outstretched, open, empty, needy hands. In the words of the hymn writer Augustus Toplady:

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!”

So, you may say, if salvation and eternal life is a free gift for wicked sinners that lasts for ever, doesn’t that just give those who receive it a licence to sin wantonly after conversion. But it doesn’t work like that, because when a person is truly saved or born again that is when the Spirit of God enters the soul of that

person and He brings spiritual life and a brand-new heart and nature. In Ezekiel 11:19 God says, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh.” You are no longer the same. You become a partaker of the divine nature, (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). When you are saved you become a brand-new person. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”

And so, because you have the very life of God within you, and a new heart and a new nature, the saved, born-again believer, will always produce spiritual fruit; there will be a strong inclination to follow Christ and live a life of holiness; there will be an overwhelming desire to turn from sin.

Now some will follow more than others; some will produce more fruit than others; some may even backslide at times; but there will always be some fruit. But note: that fruit is the “product” and not the “root” of salvation – it doesn’t get you saved; it doesn’t make you a Christian; it comes after conversion, not before; after you have already received the free gift of everlasting life; it doesn’t get you to Heaven or even help get you there. Instead, it is the evidence of a salvation that has already been received by faith.

But sadly, most people just can’t believe that salvation, according to the Bible, really is free for the bankrupt sinner who simply trusts in Jesus, and that you must come that way and only that way if you are to be eternally saved. In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus tells the story of a Pharisee and a tax collector who both went up to the temple to pray. Now the Pharisee was clearly the much better person in every way, and he thanked God accordingly that he was not like other men, especially this sinful tax collector over here. But the tax collector prayed and wouldn’t so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven but smote on his breast saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It was this man, Jesus said, that “went down to his house justified (saved) rather than the other.” Why? It’s because he admitted his spiritual bankruptcy and received mercy and salvation as a free gift. Now this is hard for all

of us to do. We all like to think that even though we may sin, there is still some good in us. But, as long as you think that, you will never be saved, never be converted, never get to Heaven. That is why I am writing this: because everywhere, and that includes most churches, you hear a completely false Gospel; a totally unbiblical and false way of salvation; that is by working for it, leading a good life, trying your best, being kind and generous, by going to church. But none of that saves a person. It is all, as Isaiah says, (Isaiah 64:6), “filthy rags”.

In Philippians 3:4-9 Paul listed all his religious credits: “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” But he called it all “rubbish” compared to knowing Jesus as his Saviour.

And we must have the same attitude to our lives as Paul if we are to be saved, for we are all spiritually bankrupt, and all our religious deeds, all our good works, all our achievements, a whole lifetime of trying our best, counts for absolutely nothing. Instead, we are all headed to an eternal Hell, and Hell is what we deserve.

You see, unless we have our spiritual eyes opened to the depths of our sin and depravity, as well as to the holiness of God, we will never be saved. Instead, we will remain totally lost, damned, and headed to everlasting destruction in a Christ-less eternity.

You know, self-righteousness is deadly. It will catapult anyone who has it into an eternal Hell quicker and more assuredly than just about anything. In Matthew 22:1-14 we read about a man who had on his own clothes instead of the King’s wedding garment in the story of the marriage feast. The man’s own clothes are a picture of the self-righteousness that will bar every single person who trusts in it from entering Heaven. The King said to the man, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” And the man was speechless. He had thought that he looked pretty good; he was satisfied with his own clothes. But then

the King said to his servants, “Bind him hand and foot and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now, Jesus doesn't say that the man was immoral, or a liar, or a thief, or a drunkard; that he was guilty of a whole list of gross sins. No, his only “crime” was simply not having on the right wedding garment supplied by the King in order to enter the feast. And so too must we be rightly clothed in Christ's righteousness if we are to see and enter Heaven. It is a declaration by God at conversion that because the believer is so clothed, God sees that “saved” person as being as perfect and righteous as Christ. The Bible even has a name for such a declaration of imputed righteousness; it is called “justification” and it lasts for ever; and it is the only way a person becomes good enough to enter Heaven; they are freely given it by God.

Hence, it is saved people who go to Heaven and not good people. Why? Because they are the ones who, no matter how wicked and vile, have received a righteousness that is not their own; that is the righteousness of Christ imputed to their spiritual account at salvation. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 it says: “For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In other words, at salvation, a transaction takes place: you give Jesus the filthy rags of your sin and He, in return, gives you His perfect righteousness. It is like the king's wedding garment of Matthew 22 that we all must put on. And when we do that, it clothes us perfectly. Thus, when God sees those that are saved, even though they are sinful, He doesn't see a single sin or imperfection of any kind; instead, He sees the righteousness of His own Son clothing that person, and so is infinitely satisfied; and what is more it lasts for ever.

And so, I say again, it is saved people that go to Heaven. Why? Because they are, in God's sight, perfectly righteous. That's grace; that's the Gospel. The trouble with most churches is that they confuse the so-called good acts of a person with a person's God-given imputed righteousness received at salvation. Paul

addresses the issue in Romans 10:2–4 where he says: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

And if we refuse to receive that imputed righteousness? Then one day we will hear Jesus say, when we exit this life, “I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity.” Those words of Jesus are taken from Matthew 7:21-23 which must rank as one of the most terrifying passages in all of Scripture, for there Jesus said that, “not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Right there, Jesus is saying that many good, moral, religious people, people who have loyally served Him throughout their lives and who have “many wonderful works” to prove it, will be on the receiving end of His rejection. They will then be banished to an everlasting torment with no way back. To quote John Bunyan: “I see there is a way to Hell, even from the portals of Heaven.”

So, who is “he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven” so that he goes there? What then is doing the will of God regarding salvation? Jesus has the answer in John 6:28, 29, where a group of people asked Him: “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” And Jesus replied: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” In other words, Jesus was simply saying, “Believe in me.”

Again, in John 6 (verse 40) Jesus says: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have

everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” That’s it! But it must be a saving faith in the heart that believes and trusts in Jesus alone for salvation.

So, I hope you can now see why I have written this warning to you to “flee from the wrath to come”. You see, your sins and mine will be punished somewhere: either on the Cross when you place your trust in Christ’s finished work for you in this life, or, if you refuse God’s gracious offer of a free pardon, then in Hell in the life to come for all eternity.

You know, there is not a single verse in the entire Bible which even hints at the possibility of a second chance to get saved after death. No, salvation – if it is ever to be obtained – must be received in this life or not at all.

So often, people launch out into the Christian life, or they respond to what they think is a call to follow Christ in Christian service, when all along the Devil makes sure that they don’t do the very first and most important thing of all, namely, to respond to God’s call to salvation. And so they spend their lives working hard to build what looks from the outside to be a really beautiful and well constructed house; a house which, like their life, appears to many to be just as good as that of any “born-again Christian”.

Jesus talks about this in Matthew 7:24-27 where He compares two houses and two builders. There we read that the storm, picturing judgment, came along with the floods, and the wind blew and beat upon both houses but only one survived, the one built on a rock. As for the other which was built on sand, it fell and great was the fall of it. Why? It’s because the house had a faulty foundation. It’s a picture of the so-called “Christian life” of a person who was never truly “saved” or “born again”, whose whole Christian experience never began with true conversion and the “new birth”. Instead, the builder never even did what was the vitally important first thing which was to trust in Christ, the Rock, alone for salvation.

You see, your house, your life, might look pretty good to other people, but you cannot fool God. If you’ve never been saved then you are lost, and one day that whole edifice of your apparently good life will come crashing down in the

judgment and you will find yourself in a hopeless Hell for ever. As tenderly and sincerely as I know how, I plead with you to make sure you are saved.

As for examples of people who started to build their lives on such a faulty foundation, I can name two, yet both of them went on to become giants in the faith after their later conversions. One was Martin Luther who was a very, very devout Roman Catholic priest and monk who took his faith immensely seriously and who made it his business to do everything he could to mortify his flesh. He had a deep awareness of his own sinfulness and would sleep without blankets in the middle of winter in order to try and subdue his sinful desires. All along he knew that God required a perfect righteousness if he were ever to enter Heaven, so much so that Luther would confess his sins for up to 6 hours a day. If any man were serious about turning from sin and following Christ it was Martin Luther.

But then a remarkable thing happened. He was reading the book of Romans one day when one particular passage especially spoke to his heart and soul. It was Romans 1:16 and 17 where Paul writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Right there, in a way he had never understood before, Luther realised that the righteousness God requires He also provides when we are justified by faith.

And so Luther was converted, saved, born again, and thus began the Protestant Reformation which was not, incidentally, a new form of Christianity, but a return to the New Testament teaching of Jesus, Paul and the Apostles on salvation by “grace through faith”, (cf. Ephesians 2:8 and 9). As for Luther, he gave up being a priest and monk, and left the Catholic Church completely (he even married) now that he had found and received a salvation he could never lose.

The other giant of the faith I want to mention is John Wesley, the founder of the “Methodist” movement. He too, like Luther, began his life as someone who also took his faith very seriously. He had been raised as one of 19 children by a

Godly Christian mother, and as a young man Wesley was deeply committed to following Christ; so much so in fact that he and his brother Charles began what became known as the “Holy Club” in Oxford where they dedicated their lives to pursuing what they believed to be sinless perfection.

It wasn’t long then before Wesley answered what he perceived to be the call of God to travel to North America to preach the Gospel to the Indians. However, it happened that, while the ship was crossing the Atlantic, it encountered a fierce storm and Wesley feared for his life. Yet, travelling with him was a group of “born-again” Moravian Christians who so impressed Wesley by their lack of fear in the face of imminent death, that it later went on to influence him profoundly. As for the Indians, he did preach to them (though with little success) after which he finally returned home.

But then Wesley wrote a remarkable statement in his journal: “I have learned what I least of all suspected, that I, who went to America to convert the Indians, was never myself converted to God.” It had taken him all that time, and effort, and struggling and striving to lead the Christian life before Wesley finally realised, he was not saved himself and therefore not even a Christian. It was then, a short time later, that Wesley was attending a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London where the minister was reading aloud from Martin Luther’s preface to his commentary on the book of Romans. Wesley recalls the event in his journal where he writes: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine....” And so, John Wesley was converted and saved for ever, simply by trusting in Jesus, something he had never been able to achieve by all the struggling and striving, the “Holy Club”, or as a missionary crossing the Atlantic to preach the Gospel to the Indians.

Thank God indeed that both Luther and Wesley realised before it was too late, that, despite all of their best efforts and commitment, they weren’t even

Christians. I thank God too that you have now heard the true Biblical Gospel of God's free unmerited grace, so that you can also, like those two giants of the faith, be saved for all eternity and know it. God does not want us to be in any doubt because when God saves, He lets us know. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 5:13, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life..." You see, you can know that you are saved, and saved for ever; that you have the very life of God within your soul. Why? It's because God, as I said earlier, changes your heart and nature and with it your entire life. You have the witness of the Spirit that you are truly God's child (cf. Romans 8:16).

The true "born-again believer" really is saved for all eternity, and will never face judgment for their sin, either in this life or the life to come. Why? It's because Jesus was judged in the believer's place on the Cross 2,000 years ago and God does not judge sin twice over. That's the Gospel; that's the Good News. It's that which I long for you to see with the spiritual eyes of your soul, your precious soul which, in the words of Jesus, is worth more than the whole world.

The other day, I witnessed to a young Catholic man outside Westminster Cathedral, here in London. I explained the Gospel and told him that because Jesus had already died, the way was now open for him to be forgiven and receive eternal life no matter what sin he had committed. He nodded in agreement as I told him of God's free unmerited grace towards Hell-bound sinners. "Yes", he said. He did believe in grace and the free gift of salvation; that Jesus did die for his sins; that forgiveness and eternal life were but a prayer away; that justification was indeed by grace alone through faith alone. I thought that at last here was someone who understood the Gospel and who wanted to respond, when, after a brief pause, he said, "But you still need to live it." What can I say? – a thousand times, "No!" We can never live it; the standard is far too high. Like so many people, this young man couldn't get past his belief, taught by the Catholic Church like so many other churches, that salvation was something we have to earn by leading a good life.

And that is how it is with most people. They simply cannot believe that going to Heaven is a free gift for wicked, vile, bankrupt sinners who simply trust in Jesus. That is why Jesus said that “the way to life is narrow and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:14).

Instead, many churches tell their congregations that we are all called to “live out the Gospel”. The various popes have all said this and the present one is no exception. It seems so right, doesn’t it? People have the idea that because Jesus, (in Mark 12:30-31), summed up all the commandments in these two commandments – “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength... and shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” – that that imperative constitutes the Gospel. What on earth could be wrong with that? But that is not the Good News; that is not the Gospel, having to live out what is so difficult and which we all fail at anyway. Instead, Jesus “lived out the Gospel”.

So let us be clear right now about what the Bible actually says is the “Good News”. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul writes, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel... by which ye are saved... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” That, is the Gospel.

It is everything that Jesus has done – His death, burial and resurrection – not what we do; not our good works; not our religious deeds; not our best efforts. Nothing that we do counts for anything when it comes to receiving the forgiveness of sins and eternal life which Jesus died to obtain for us.

Instead, He’s done it all. He loved with a perfect love; He never sinned; He led the perfect life God demands of you and me, and He died the death we all deserve. “It Is Finished!” That’s the Gospel. Believe any other, and no matter how attractive it may seem, and no matter how sincerely it is believed and followed, it will damn your soul for ever if you adhere to it.

But most people cannot understand this. The Bible even says that “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:18) which is you if you’ve never been converted.

So, will you admit that you are a hopeless and helpless guilty sinner headed to judgment and everlasting destruction; that all your good works are like filthy rags in God’s sight; and that, when it comes to salvation and going to Heaven, (and I say this with the greatest respect) a whole lifetime of trying one’s best counts for absolutely nothing? Will you? That’s hard to admit for any man. That’s why most people, Jesus said, are damned, while only a tiny number ever reach Heaven.

In Matthew 7:13, 14 Jesus says: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” There you have it. In the shocking words of the Saviour only a few ever find the way to life.

Now, this is borne out in various surveys which try to give one an idea of how many people are actually “born-again” Christians. One survey I heard said that most people who are saved, are saved by the age of 19, and if you are not converted by the age of 35 then the chances of you subsequently getting saved are 1 in 10,000!

But the survey didn’t stop there. It concluded that if you are not saved by the age of 70, the chances of you being converted after that age are 1 in 1 million!

Now I wouldn’t argue that we can know that with any accuracy but the point surely is this: Jesus was right when He said “few there be that find the way to life”. This again is evidenced by “born-again” Christian people who are involved in full-time evangelistic ministry. I heard (on Premier Christian Radio) a woman give an account of her 42 years spent as a full-time missionary to Muslims in various Arab countries. And do you know how many people were “saved” out of the thousands she witnessed to during those 42 years? Just six! You heard it right – six!

Then there was the Christian husband and wife team who went as full-time evangelists to Japan for 20 years. And do you know how many people were saved as a result of their witness and missionary endeavours during that time? Not one! That's right, not even one in 20 years!

So, you may say, "Well, you know, the countries in those examples weren't "Christian"; their culture was very different to ours in the West, and besides, they were happy with their own beliefs."

Okay, so how about looking at another evangelist's experience closer to home; that is right here in London. It is the testimony of someone called Wendy, who was a full-time evangelist with a mission organisation here in the capital for 18 years. And in that time, she worked with young people, and old people, in schools, care homes, hospitals and hospices. And do you know how many saved converts she had during those years? Again, not even one! That's in 18 years of full-time evangelistic ministry!

Now, I am drawing your attention to all this so you will see that what Jesus said about the "narrow way" and "the few", is borne out in reality, and that instead of most people going to Heaven, as most people in fact think, only a tiny number ever get there. This, I hope, should sound alarm bells deep in your soul. It certainly did that for me before my conversion, when a "born-again" Christian friend shared this stark Biblical truth with me. Prior to that, I had thought, as a Catholic, that there was nothing to worry about, because, after all, didn't we all one day end up in Heaven anyway, after maybe a stint in Purgatory? (which, incidentally, is not in the Bible).

Like so many, I reasoned that most people were good, or at least tried to be, and hence were surely destined for Heaven, and that because I was like most of them – that is not too bad (or so I thought) – I also had a pretty good chance of getting there. In short, I was spiritually blind, totally complacent, not once considering the holiness of God or the depths of my own sin. That is, until I

understood Matthew 7:13 and 14 when I began to ponder the thought that perhaps I might be one of the lost.

You know, the true Gospel really is good news. Jesus cried out on the Cross, “It Is Finished”, or, if you prefer, “Paid In Full”. He really did pay the price for all those who would simply believe. Thus, God can then remove the sin from the believer “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12) which is how far? It is infinite; that’s how far.

The Bible also says that the sins of the believer are “cast into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19), and that God will “remember their iniquities and sins no more,” (Jeremiah 31:34). Now that is good news.

And so, you see that a person is saved entirely by God’s grace because Jesus fully paid the penalty in the sinner’s place. It is therefore a free gift. Do you remember I quoted earlier Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death” (which is Hell; which is the bad news). Well, that same verse then goes on to say, “But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”, which is the good news, and which cancels out all the bad. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Titus 3:5 says: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” Salvation really is then a free gift, which we can never earn, paid for by the blood that Jesus shed on the Cross. That’s good news; that’s the Gospel.

And so, I pray that this letter will awaken your soul, so that you too might find rest, forgiveness of sin and everlasting life. But you must come God’s way to Christ who promises: “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37). In a verse of scripture, which incidentally, the Lord used to save a friend of mine, Jesus (in Matthew 11:28) says, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In Isaiah 1:18 God says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Also, right at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 22:17, there is a final invitation where it says: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life FREELY.” That’s right, “FREELY”, but we must receive it. We don’t have eternal life automatically. We must “call on the name of the Lord.” In Psalm 116, verses 12 and 13, it says: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” Finally, in Acts 2:21, as well as in Romans 10:13, it says: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Amazing! Question is: will you?

Now, make no mistake about what is being said, for what is at stake here is your soul’s very survival; where you are going to spend eternity; where you are going to go when you die; either to a glorious Heaven or to a place of unimaginable never-ending conscious torment in the lake of fire. There is no Purgatory; there is no second chance after death. There’s either the “Great White Throne Judgment” of Revelation 20 for every unsaved sinner followed by a certain Hell; or rewards with no mention of sin or punishment at the “Judgment Seat of Christ” followed by Heaven for every “born-again believer”.

It really is that stark: two different people: the “saved” and the “lost”; two different judgments: that of rewards or punishment; two different destinies: Heaven or Hell. And you only have this life in which to choose your final destiny. There really is only one window of opportunity in which to get saved, and that window closes for ever the moment you close your eyes for the last time.

You could die at any moment. That is why the Bible says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians. 6:2). You are a prayer away from salvation, so why won’t you come? Is it because of self-

righteousness; because you are satisfied with your life right now; because you see no need; because you cannot believe that God would send you to Hell simply for not believing the Gospel?

Besides, you may say, isn't God a God of love? – a gracious and merciful heavenly Father who desires all men to be saved? How then can He send most people to a fiery Hell simply for not trusting in Jesus. It's because He is also infinitely pure, holy, righteous and just and therefore cannot let unholy, unrighteous, sinful people who've never been cleansed, who have never had all of their sin washed away by the blood of Christ, into His Heaven. You need to be regenerated; you need to be saved; you need to be born again, converted; there is no other way to get to Heaven.

In John Chapter 3 Jesus said to a good man, a deeply religious man, even a religious leader of his day, "Nicodemus, you must be born again." Jesus didn't commend him for a religious life well lived, and say, "Well done, just keep up the good work and everything will be just fine." No, He said, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," (verse 3).

But, like most people, including most religious people, Nicodemus didn't have a clue about what Jesus was talking. Instead, many people believe that when Jesus said to Nicodemus that you must be born of "water and the Spirit" he was referring to "water baptism" plus "confirmation". But carrying out any such ritual can never save anyone. If baptism saves a person, if baptism brings about the "new birth", then why did the Apostle Paul (who was in the business of saving people) say in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, "I thank God I baptized none of you ... for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel..."?

No, let's be clear, being "born of water and the spirit" speaks of the spiritual cleansing that the Holy Spirit brings about when He applies God's Word, the Gospel, to the heart of the believer at salvation. Paul, in Ephesians 5:26, refers to "washing of water by the word." Jesus, in John 15:3 tells his disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." In 1 Peter 1:23 Peter

refers to “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.” In Titus 3:5 Paul says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration” (that’s the “new birth”) “and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

Please, do not go to Hell because of stubbornness and wilful ignorance. God even says in Hosea 4:6 that “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Make sure you’re saved. Call upon Him today and He will hear you and save you and what’s more you’ll know it.

The way really is open to any and all who will simply come; for the blood has been shed; the sacrifice made; Jesus really has done it all for every lost sinner, including you: “It Is Finished!” Even though most people remain lost and unconverted, you don’t have to be one of them; it really is so clear and straightforward that even a child can understand it; simply, with a broken, contrite and repentant heart, “call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be saved.” As someone once said, “Jesus didn’t come to make good men better; He came to make dead men alive.” Instead, we are all spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins until the Lord quickens us by His Spirit and we are regenerated and made spiritually alive at the “new birth”. (Cf. Ephesians 2:1). As we’ve been seeing, from God’s Word, we all need to be saved; we all need to be forgiven; we all need to receive a perfect righteousness that is not our own. Moreover, we need Eternal Life, the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and a relationship with the Father that will never end, as we become members of His family and thereby “heirs of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ.” But we also need a new heart and a new nature, and all of that happens at the moment of conversion, when we repent and put our total trust and faith in the Saviour, and in Him alone, for the forgiveness of our sins.

One Final Plea: That is for everyone reading this who has not yet been saved and therefore not yet been forgiven. For, consider this: you are effectively a prisoner

on “Death Row,” awaiting execution. You have already been tried and found guilty; the sentence has been passed, and it is Death. So, what do you do? Do you ask for a retrial on the grounds that you are innocent, or that the judge is unjust? I don’t think so, for in this case, the judge is an infinitely wise, all-seeing, all-knowing God, who has kept a meticulous record of everything you’ve ever thought, said, and done, in your entire life. What is more, the judge has made it clear that even one small infringement of His Law, even committed once, will result in the Death Penalty. So, again, what do you do? How about this: you admit your guilt and you plead for mercy; after all, there’s nothing else you can do. But wait! We have a problem: the judge is a just judge so has to punish your wrongdoing, or else He’s not just. He cannot therefore let you go Free without your crimes being punished. So, what does the judge then do? I will tell you what He does. He takes off his wig and gown, and then defers to the One sitting beside Him. It is His Son, His only Son. The judge immediately rises to His feet and to the assembled Court He makes this pronouncement: that His Son has offered to pay what He, the judge, requires; that He alone will atone for your crimes with His Death; that’s His Death in place of your Death.

But wait; there’s more; it can only be the Son’s Death that can satisfy the judge, because it was only ever the Son who lived a totally crime-free, spotless, blameless life. That’s right, going right back into Eternity past – and I trust you can now see that this whole story is about the Salvation that God provides through the substitutionary death of His Son – Jesus was always totally righteous. Thus, the punishment He received when He died in your place wasn’t punishment for what He did wrong – He never did any wrong – but instead it was for what you did. So, now God the judge of all the Earth can say, “I too am a merciful judge as well as righteous, a Royal King of both Heaven and Earth who delights in mercy and showing clemency. For now, I will grant a Free Pardon, not just for you, guilty prisoner, but for any and all who will accept my Son, and everything He did in your place.

And so, the Son then dies the horrible death you deserved, and you walk away from the Court a Freeman. But wait! The judge has another pronouncement: He is going to adopt you into His Family and make you an heir of all He possesses. But there is even more: God raises His Son back to life, for He is to be married; for the body of “Believers” in Jesus are to become his “Bride.” God then prepares the Heavenly Banquet; there are “Rewards,” there are “Crowns,” and the infinite outpouring of an inexhaustible love that lasts for ever. I think you get the picture, for it is one of unimaginable, everlasting Heavenly joy.

But here’s the thing, to be amongst the throng of all the “Redeemed of All the Ages,” you must be forgiven; you must come to God His Way: by owning up and admitting your guilt and your shame; there must be a brokenness, a godly sorrow, and repentance for all that you’ve done wrong. You’ve got no other option; for you can never hope to pay off what is an infinite debt; for it is vast, and beyond measure. And so, it all comes down to this: what will you do with Jesus? What will you do with God’s Son? Will you bow before Him and accept His offer, or turn your back on Him and walk away. The choice is yours; can you not see it? For in the Courtroom of Eternity you will one day stand and give an account of your life. And yes, you will be facing an infinitely Holy and Righteous God who abhors your sin. But wait! As we have been seeing, He is also a God of infinite, everlasting Mercy, and Grace, and Love, who longs to forgive you, the guilty prisoner awaiting execution.

So, let’s hear it from the Scripture: “For He hath looked down from the height of His Sanctuary; from Heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death,” (Psalm 102:19-20). “To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. For I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another,” (Isaiah 42:7,8). “For He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” (Isaiah 61:1). For “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow

of death, being bound in affliction and iron.... Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.... For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder,” (Psalm 107:10,13,14,16).

Can you not see it? Jesus has already paid the price you could not pay; He has already bled, and suffered and died: “It is Finished!” And so, I pray that you would simply look to Him and His Cross; that you would follow the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus as he makes his profession of faith, (Luke 23:39-43). For, as the 19th Century preacher, “Charles Spurgeon,” used to say: “If you can’t run to the Cross then walk; if you can’t walk to the Cross then crawl; and if you can’t crawl to the Cross, then look, for there is power in a “look.” Only then, after Christ has set us, the guilty captives, free, from sin’s imprisonment, can we follow Christ in the Christian life and be for ever “accepted in the beloved.” The hymn writer, Charles Wesley, said it beautifully:

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”