



*The
Loveliness
of
Jesus*

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THE GOSPEL PLAN OF SALVATION

God's Steps to Salvation

1. Hear – Romans 10:17
2. Believe – John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6
3. Repent – Acts 17:30
4. Confess – Romans 10:10
5. Be Baptized – Acts 2:38, 22:16

Saved – in Christ
(Galatians 3:27)



Lost – without Christ
(Ephesians 2:12)

THE LOVELINESS OF JESUS

As we read the first four books of the New Testament we see that Christ *had* come, just as the prophets foretold. That which had once been in the future had now become reality. The heavenly host had lost its most precious gem, for the Lord of Glory had come to earth. In this expression of divine love, mankind can find redemption. God so loved that He gave His Son.

Indeed, as Paul declares: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

It is eminently important that we come to know Jesus in a very intimate way for it is through Him that salvation is obtainable. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Once God's voice boomed forth from heaven: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him” (Matthew 17:5)!“”

How blessed we are to have a beautiful record of God's matchless life within the pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. From the angel's song of “peace on earth,” which attended His birth, until the moment He ascended back to heaven, we can read of the greatest One who ever graced this earth. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14)! “Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51).

Jesus came down from the heaven to do the Father's will. We read about this in John. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

With nobility of purpose and solemn resolve, He never wavered from that obedient attitude. “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

Not only did Jesus live perfectly, He also taught authoritatively. “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who

committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (I Peter 2:21–22). At the conclusion of the famous *Sermon on the Mount* we can read of the reaction of the audience. “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28–29).

Yes, Christ had the authority of Heaven behind every word He spoke and every deed He performed. “Jesus came spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (Matthew 28:18).

This power leaves no place for any *supposed* “Vicar of Christ on earth.” Since our Lord knew *what was in man*, He was fully capable of imparting spiritual truths to the people of all time in a truly magnificent way. “Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:24–25).

The parables of Jesus will live forever as a tribute to His genius, and yet also to His compassion for all. Even casual readers of the Bible have thrilled to “the human touch” contained in the stories of the *Prodigal Son*, the *Good Samaritan*, and the *Lost Sheep*. At least thirty of these parables fell from the lips of the Savior as He illustrated spiritual truths by using earthly stories. “The officers answered, ‘No man ever spoke like this Man’ ” (John 7:46)

The miracles of Christ magnified His claims to be the long awaited Messiah. As Jesus stilled the tempest, fed multitudes with scanty provisions, and raised Lazarus from the dead, the earth echoed with the shout: “... Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

It is no wonder that Nicodemus exclaimed: “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Yet, greater than these marvelous signs of His infinite power was His deep concern for lost mankind. As majestic as He was, still Jesus found time to be the friend of the individual.

The gospel account by John stressed the Deity of Christ, but it also portrays vividly the compassion He had for wayward men.

The Savior always found time for the lonely and the lost. Whether it was the Samaritan woman (John 4), a lame man (John 5), or one born blind (John 9), the Lord took time to touch their lives with His splendor. Praise God, He has an interest in you and me today!

This was proven by His death on our behalf over 2000 years ago. Men have been dying throughout the centuries—but never was death like His! Jesus died vicariously, that is, on behalf of others. “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (II Corinthians 5:14–15). Peter tells us that Jesus our perfect Example “... bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (I Peter 2:24).

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God was pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:18–21). Our Savior died painfully. The Roman scourging received prior to the actual crucifixion was enough to kill some men. The heavy burden of the cross was additional agony.

Usually, in the first century, when one was *nailed to the tree*, he was laid on top of the crude cross while it lay on the ground. Spikes were driven sharply into the criminal's hands and feet. Then, suddenly, in excruciating pain, the cross would be projected between heaven and earth. These terrible things were experienced by the greatest One who ever walked the sands of time. The crowd mocked Him; blood from the wreath of thorns flowed down His face. No wonder the hymn writer has touched many hearts with these words:

“See from His head, His Hands, His feet
Sorrow and blood flow mingled down.
Did e're such love and pity meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

Jesus *died alone*. Peter had denied Him with a fervent speech. Most of the apostles “followed afar off.” A few faithful women were nearby weeping. Nicodemus and Joseph would later prepare His body for burial. Yet, for One who had done so much for mankind, the scene about the cross was very lonely. From the Roman tree the Redeemer cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” (Matthew 27:46)? The Father looked away from the Son for a moment to view fallen man. In that glance we have hope of redemption. “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he” (Habakkuk 1:13)?

Praise God for His infinite love and Jesus for His willingness to offer His life that we might never die. A passage in II Corinthians beautifully sums up this glorious result. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (II Corinthians 8:9).

The Law of Moses Was Abolished

In Matthew we read: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). In Romans, we learn that men today are dead to the law that said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7), that we may be spiritually joined to Jesus who arose from the dead. Paul plainly declares in Galatians: “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

In three distinct passages in Hebrews we read that Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament and that He could not have been until after His death. Therefore, at the cross our Savior took away the first covenant. We are now under the last will and testament of the Lord. “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). Read Hebrews 9:16 and 10:10.

Contemplation of this scriptural thought will answer the question that is often asked about the thief on the cross. He lived and died

before Jesus shed His blood of the New Covenant. We live *after* that notable event. We live under the New Testament; the thief was subject to the Old Testament.

While Jesus was on earth He had the authority to forgive sins as He chose. "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9:6). But, when Christ died, His law for man was revealed in the New Testament. The terms for pardon, sealed in His blood, must not be changed.

According to the words of the Savior all accountable beings must believe the gospel. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). They must repent of their sins: "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). And, they must be immersed in water. "So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Phillip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

This arrangement will last until the end of the world. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age' " (Matthew 28:18-20).

The book of Matthew emphasizes the kingdom of Christ. Mark's account of the life of our Lord stresses His majesty. Luke set forth the ideal manhood of Christ. "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). John underscored the deity of the Savior.

From the first four New Testament books, we come to know about Jesus, the greatest One to walk the sands of time. The major purpose of this section of the Bible is aptly summed up in John. "But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Indeed, we must obediently follow the Redeemer for His words will judge us one day. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). In Revelation we read: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).

Yes, heaven will be the eternal home for those who properly approximate the life of Christ to their own lives. Jesus is certainly the central character in human history.

Abba, Father

The trusting, earnest devotion of Jesus to the Father's eternal purpose is the thrilling grandeur of the book of Mark. Never once wavering from the motivation of absolute obedience to the plan of Heaven for man's redemption, our Redeemer truly did all things well. His prayerful habit of constant communication with God stood Him in good stead when, in quest of lost humanity, He ate with publicans and sinners. Identifying with the needs and desires of His contemporaries led Jesus ultimately to the curse of the cross.

This conspiracy of scribes, chief priests, and elders of Judaism, plus the strange alliance with Pilate and Herod, magnified the obvious truth. “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The classic word in the religion of Christ is service. The epitome of the Christian system can be summed up in just four words—words that our Savior spoke in His speech and life, “Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10; 16:42).

Whether tempted by Satan or beset by wild beasts, or plotted against by evil men, or betrayed by friends, Jesus had the sweet consolation of prayer and the encouragement of those “not far from the kingdom!” He was often disappointed by those who would make void the Word of God through their own traditions. It grieved the Lord when potential greats like the rich young ruler allowed earthly interest to overwhelm them. The Master of ocean and sea and foam knew that one soul was worth more than earthly relationships or, indeed, even the wealth of the world could not compare to eternity's reward.

How He longed to calm the troubled heart and cheer the drooping countenance. His all-consuming passion for lost souls caused the Lord to point a nail-pierced hand to a world sinking in the depths of sin. He challenged His devotees to go teach all creation the unsearchable riches of the gospel—the *good news*—God's power to lift us up to higher ground and a closer walk with Him.

When men misused the Scriptures, it grieved Jesus tremendously. Some questioned His authority while others plotted to take His life, but the Savior loved them nonetheless. The moneychangers in the Temple reminded Him of the decaying, crumbling Jewish nation. It is a tribute to His divine power and human perfection that He would not tolerate sin, but could weep over sinners!

Finally, as the shadow of the cross loomed ever nearer and despicable men seemed more prevalent, our dearest Friend suffered agonizingly in Gethsemane. Peter, James, and John could not give even one hour of unrestrained loyalty to ease the burden of darkness and despair, but, thankfully, the Lord had bold access to the Father's throne of mercy.

In childlike trust, yet with deep, mature conviction, Jesus cried, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). The poet has well captured this scene:

"Broken at last I bowed My head;
Forgetting all Myself and said:
'Whatever comes, God's will be done,'
And in that moment, peace was won!"

Can we, in view of such unselfish and complete devotion to duty, do any less than the joyous, grateful man of Mark? "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you" (Mark 5:19).

Truly, Jesus has done all things well! The finest tribute to the Messiah is found in Isaiah. "Who has believe our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by

men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:1-7).

Using this text as the basis of his sermon, Philip “preached Jesus” to the treasurer of Ethiopia. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:35-39).

The Rejected Christ

It is hardly conceivable that anyone as wonderful as Jesus Christ would have had as many enemies as He did. As our minds retrace the beautiful life He led and the perfect pattern He set, we are amazed when we recall the fact that many in His day coldly rejected Him. How could anyone be so indifferent? How could anyone spurn such an unselfish love? Even though we cannot answer these questions, it remains a sobering, heart-breaking fact that thousands in His day turned a deaf ear to heaven's will expressed so capably in Jesus, the Son of God.

During the time that Christ walked and talked upon the earth, the hatred and animosity of the Pharisees were expressed in various forms. We are all familiar with the crowning achievement of their hatred—coupled with the sanction of the Roman ruler—yes, the

cruel crucifixion of our Lord. Jesus was unwelcome at birth. He was opposed throughout life and, when He died, the highest ambition of many had been realized. Why did He offend? Why was He rejected? “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution” (Galatians 5:11)?

“As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’ ” (Romans 9:33). “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

I would like to suggest, first of all, that Jesus was rejected by many in His day because He emphasized the spiritual above the temporal. The Jews of that day looked for, and expected, an earthly kingdom. They had read the Old Testament prophecies of a coming King who would sit on David's throne. This Messiah was to be King of kings and Lord of lords. But, due to their emphasis on material values, they failed to realize that the kingdom of Christ would never be an earthly empire.

As we follow the life and teaching of Jesus as revealed in the New Testament, we can plainly see the misconceptions that the religious leaders of that day had.

On one occasion Jesus had to hide Himself because the Jews were trying to make Him a king by force. “When Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone” (John 6:15).

Even the disciples that were close to Christ seem to have had a misconception of His Lordship. Jesus made it plain that He was not a rival of Caesar for earthly power when He stated, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

One of the saddest scenes in all of the Bible is that found in the sixth chapter of John after Jesus tells His followers of His spiritual rather than material emphasis. The record states that many of the multitude ceased to follow Him. So great was the falling away from the masses, who Jesus looked to for friendship, that he pathetically asked the intimate few, the twelve disciples, “Do you also want to go away” (John 6:67)?

What changed the attitude of the people? At one time they had praised the name of their leader, Jesus of Nazareth. But now, in disappointment, they turned away and followed Christ no more. C.R. Brewer has well expressed this scene in these words:

“A Hero stood amid a throng,
And heard them cry His name.
They praised His deed in word and song,
And shouts of loud acclaim.

A King they said—A King of men,
We want no other guide.
Bring forth the crown and let Him reign,
There's no one else beside.

This was their loud, exulting cry
Throughout the livelong day.
But 'ere a second night drew nigh;
Their hearts had turned away.

How quickly did their praises die;
The Hero stood alone.
While some, in silence, passed Him by,
Some jeered or cast a stone.

How fickle is the heart of man
And faith is oh so frail,
And he who finds no higher plan
Walks in death's dark vail.”

There are many people today who are expecting Jesus to have an earthly kingdom. Various religious groups teach the doctrine of premillennialism, that is, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth in the city of Jerusalem.

Many denominational preachers teach that the Lord will have a literal, material reign on this earth at the time of His Second Coming. In fact, this teaching forms a basis or central point of many religions of our day. There is not one ounce of truth in this doctrine. The Bible teaches that Christ is now reigning. He is at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places. “He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly

places” (Ephesians 1:20). Christ will not reign upon this earth when He comes because, at that time, the earth will burn up. In II Peter we read: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (II Peter 3:10).

Where are the teachers of the earthly kingdom theory going to put Christ's throne? Not on the earth! Peter tells us it will melt with fervent heat. Those who teach and believe that the Lord will set up a literal, material kingdom will be just as disappointed in Jesus as were the Jews of His day. Christ was rejected because He would not be a temporal King. He exalted the spiritual above the material.

In the second place, Christ Jesus was rejected by many in His day because He condemned the religious customs and traditions of the prominent Jewish sects. Jesus accused them of lip worship when their hearts were far from Him. He labeled their worship as vain because it was according to the doctrines and commandments of men. “He answered and said to them, ... ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’ ” (Mark 7:6–7).

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’ ” (Matthew 15:7–9). He called the Pharisees hypocrites (Matthew 23:14). Christ was not offensive primarily because He preached positive truths; it was His exposure of error that caused men to reject Him.

One of the aims of Jesus in His teaching was to uproot human religions with their elaborate ritualism, pomp, and pageantry. Because He condemned their religious practices, the Jews refused to accept Jesus. There are those today who are offended when error is condemned. They do not seem to think a person can have the mind of Christ and be critical of any modern religious doctrine or practice. But one must condemn error wherever found if he is to be Christ-like. Jesus was no master compromiser. His aim and purpose was to uphold truth and overthrow error.

Why Did Jesus Die?

Under this heading we shall discuss those forces that contributed to His death. We have noticed the necessity of Christ's life being taken from the earth. Now we will see why such a tragedy occurred. It was a combination of:

1. **The love of God.** “but God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
2. **The weakness of man.** The betrayal of Judas, the denial by Peter, the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish nation—all of these things brought about the death of our Lord.
3. **The cowardice of Pilate.** Even though he could find no fault with the man of Nazareth, Pilate condemned Him to death. Popularity meant more to him than principle.
4. **The humanity of Jesus.** “And being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). In Gethsemane, He said humbly, “Your kingdom come. You will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).
5. **Our desperate need of salvation.** Certainly the major reason for Calvary was the despicable condition of mankind. “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’ ” (Romans 3:10). There was no hope apart from Christ Jesus. “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The Hebrew writer tells us that: “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). A very grateful apostle Paul stated: “... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (I Timothy 1:15).

Jesus was executed during the Jewish feast of Passover. Historians tell us that two million Hebrews were in or about the city of Jerusalem for such an occasion. Not once did He allow the pettiness of others to divert the will of God. When asked,

“Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered and said, “It is as you say” (Luke 23:3). So radiant was He, even on the cross, that a centurion said, “... Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

A sincere study of the death of Christ will just naturally lead one to the subject of baptism. In Romans 6:1–5, we see that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is vividly portrayed when a person becomes dead to sin, is buried with Christ in baptism, and subsequently raised to walk in a new manner of life.

The identical point is referred to in Colossians as, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). Thus, gospel baptism is neither foolish nor arbitrary. It is a necessary command of God for man that conveys the deepest spiritual meaning. The act of baptism puts a person into Christ. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

All blessings are found in Christ. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). These are some of the grand lessons we learn as we meditate upon the death of our Lord. If we appropriate these blessings to our lives, we shall never really die. To such ones the second death (eternal punishment) has no power. We agree with Wilbur Chapman who wrote:

“One day when heaven was filled with His praises,
One day when sin was as black as could be,
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin,
Dwelt among men, my example is He.

Living He loved me, dying He saved me,
Buried He carried my sins far away.
Rising He justified me—freely forever,
One day He is coming, O Glorious Day.”

Not only do we see from this lesson that the life of Christ was free from pretension, His teachings filled with simplicity, His plan of salvation exceedingly clear, and the worship of the early

Christians void of pretense or hypocrisy, but we also find that even the hope which we have in Christ is a simple thing. We do not look for a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; nor do we yearn for a million dollars at the close of life. All of our hopes as a Christian are summed up in one word—heaven.

But, sinner friend, heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Heaven is a sublime hope of the Christian. Are you a Christian today? Have you humbly submitted to the simplicity of the gospel plan of salvation? May God help us all to study His word, obey His will, and then someday be able to go home to live with Christ, our blessed Redeemer!

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Matthew 28:18-20

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