



discover peace

*Uncover the plan to save you from harm
and give you the assurance found in the gospel*

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This story hit world news. On a late spring afternoon in 1924, in the outskirts of Chicago, 14-year-old Bobby Franks was walking home from school when a grey automobile carrying two men pulled alongside and coaxed the boy in. They drove to a distant location where they grabbed the child and beat him to death. Afterward, they stopped at a restaurant, ate lunch, and then dumped the body in a drainpipe under a railroad track.

What made this case so infamous were the men who committed it. Coming from one of the wealthiest families in Chicago, eighteen year old Richard Loeb was the son of a retired vice-president of Sears and Roebuck, a well-known chain store in America. Nineteen year old Nathan Leopold, the son of a millionaire box manufacturer, had a genius IQ, was a law student at the University of Chicago, and planned on studying at Harvard.

What, then, caused these two young men to do this horrible act? Though many factors were involved, it seems that they wanted to commit the perfect crime - simply for the sake of committing it, nothing more.

Their perfect crime however, quickly fell apart when a workman stumbled upon the body, and found a pair of Nathan Leopold's horned-rimmed glasses nearby. One clue led to another, and the boys finally confessed, leading to the trial of the century in which world-renowned lawyer, Clarence Darrow, argued their case.

Darrow argued - working to keep them off death row - that they were just products of their environment, and besides, Nathan Leopold was a student of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, which helped explain why he did it.

NIETZSCHE MADE ME DO IT

This isn't the only time Friedrich Nietzsche's name has been invoked to help explain why young men commit horrible acts of murder and mayhem. After the Columbine school massacre in 1999 in Colorado USA, Nietzsche's name was again mentioned as a source of the two killers' motives.

In 2011, twenty-two year old Jared Lee Loughner opened fire at a political rally in Arizona, killing six and wounding fourteen others, including a U.S. congresswoman. He also, it was claimed, had been influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche.

What was it about this man Nietzsche, dead since 1900, that links him to all sorts of things - fascism, socialism, even Marilyn Manson? The fact is, however, Nietzsche is linked to all sorts of things that in most cases he would have had no interest in.

GOD IS DEAD

Nietzsche is best known however, for his often quoted and often misinterpreted statement: *God is dead*. It was simply his way of saying that, as humanity entered the 20th century, it had pretty much discarded not only Christian theology but Christian morality as well. *There was, he said, nothing transcendent above us. We have to make our own way, create our own morality, our own value system, because God is dead.*

Who, at times, hasn't perhaps felt that, indeed, *God is dead*? Who hasn't, in dark moments, when the whole world seems wrong, when your own life seems wrong, when in your quest for peace you feel only guilt - who hasn't in such moments wondered if, in fact, *God is dead*?

THE ROARING LION

These booklets, of course, take a completely different track. Far from God being dead, we confidently believe that He is real, that He is alive, and that He is actively involved in the fate of humanity. More so we believe the famous words - not that God is dead - but that:



God is love.

1 John 4:8

And this love, we believe, has been made especially manifest to us at the cross, where Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity. We believe that through this sacrifice we have the hope that all the evil, suffering, and death in this world - for which He is not to blame - will forever be eradicated.

This is the good news of salvation. What makes that good news even better is that it has been God's plan even from before the foundation of the world. The plan is that each of us can have the salvation offered to us by Jesus. This doesn't mean that everyone will choose it - He respects our choice. It means only that God has made a provision so that everyone who does choose - could.

Unfortunately, though, as we've been studying, we also are involved in a great controversy, a literal battle between Christ and Satan, a battle in which more than anything else Satan wants to deceive us, wants to keep us from the salvation offered each of us in Christ.



Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom

he may devour.

1 Peter 5:8

The devil seems to have succeeded in devouring poor Friedrich Nietzsche who died totally insane. But he doesn't have to succeed with us, however, not if we choose to claim for ourselves what has been offered us in Christ, even from eternity.

BEFORE THE WORLD

What does that mean - *offered us in Christ, even from eternity?*



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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Ephesians 1:3-4

Chosen in Him, even before the *foundation of the world?* That's very good news.

Look at this:



Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness - in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.

Titus 1:1-2 NIV

Before the foundation of the world is incredible enough. However, Paul pushes it back even further. We were promised eternal life before the beginning of time. Whenever exactly that was, no one knows. But we can be sure of one thing, it was long before planet earth even existed.

Thus, the great news is that long before we even existed, it was God's plan for you to have salvation in Jesus.

PREDESTINED?

This wonderful promise, however, mustn't be confused with the false idea of universalism, which teaches that in the end every human being will be saved. The Bible is very clear that people will be lost. See Matthew 7:22; Matthew 8:12, 2 Peter 3:7 as examples - and there are many more.

Nor should we confuse this teaching with a popular view called predestination, which teaches that God chooses some to be saved and some to be lost. No, everyone, every human being, was predestined for salvation in the sense that it was God's plan, even before the world began, for everyone to have eternal life in His Son. Notice the recurring theme here - predestined in Him - predestined in Christ. And in His Son? The key to grasping this idea is to understand what it means to be in Christ.



But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Hebrews 2:9 KJV

Why die for *every man* - person - if it weren't planned for every man and woman to be saved, when every man and woman won't be?



All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:6 KJV

Why take the iniquity *of us all* if the intention wasn't to pardon us all?

The plan was for everyone to take part in what God had provided. If people don't avail themselves of God's provision, that does not limit His provision any more than people starving themselves to death in a rich market place means there's not enough food. The provision has been made for every human being.

The only wildcard is our own choice - do we accept what has been offered us in Jesus, or do we reject it?

GRACE

Here's another text about what has been offered us from time immemorial:



[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

2 Timothy 1: 9

Notice the *in Christ* key? Think through what these two very important verses teach. Paul is saying here that God's salvation was given to them through God's *purpose and grace* even before *time began*. Now, if something were offered us before we even existed, then it must be something that we did not and could not earn. After all, how could we

earn something that was offered to us before we existed, before the earth existed, and even before time itself did?

We couldn't.

That's why the text says that we are saved and called *with a holy calling, not according to our works*. It couldn't be according to our works, because it was offered us before we existed to have any works.

That's why salvation has to be by grace, and grace alone.

Hence, the amazing teaching, the amazing truth, that we are saved by what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is what Christ has done for us that gives us salvation, not what we could ever do for ourselves, and that is because whatever we could do for ourselves is, simply, not good enough for salvation.

If we don't - and couldn't - deserve it, and yet we are given it anyway - then it must be a gift, something free, something unmerited.

And that's exactly what grace is; unmerited favour given to those who do not deserve it and who cannot earn it.

In short, our only claim for God's salvation is our great need for it.

SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE

This great truth is found all through the Bible, though its clearest explanations occur in the writings of the apostle Paul, who again and again showed how our salvation rests in what Christ has done for us, a truth symbolically taught in the earthly sanctuary service of the Old Testament that we studied in Booklet 5. And in it we concluded:

God had given the sacrificial system to show humans two things. First, that sin had a cost; and second, that He Himself would pay that cost. The sacrificial system was to reveal to the world what God was like. It was to show that though humans have sinned and done evil, God could forgive, but only because He was willing to accept a substitute to pay the penalty for that sin and evil.

And He, Himself in Christ, was that Substitute!

And the reason He had to be that substitute is that none of us is good enough to not need a substitute. If we could have done it on our own, then Jesus - God becoming human - would not have needed to die for us.

A GIFT, NOT A DEBT

To help get this crucial point across, the apostle Paul used one of the most faithful and holy men in the Bible - Abraham - as his example of someone who was saved, not by the works of the law but by God's grace alone. In other words, even one of the holiest of men needed the righteousness of Christ to cover his sins, because his own works, no matter how good, just weren't good enough.



For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted

for righteousness.*Romans 4:2-5*

Paul is referring to the start of Abraham's story. God had promised this childless old man that through his own seed a great nation would be born. And then, in Genesis 15:6, it says that Abraham *believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*

It was counted to him as righteousness. The theological term is imputed, which means it was granted to him even though he wasn't truly righteous. He was just considered righteous by God, He was counted righteous by God, and that's because, by faith he believed God would provide it.

In other words, Abraham didn't earn it. Abraham couldn't earn it. If he could earn it, it wouldn't be grace. It would be a debt that was owed to him, and this is a crucial truth that Paul is trying to make clear. How often people have this idea that if we work hard enough, pray enough, study enough, do enough good and loving deeds - then we can earn salvation, and if we have enough good works, God will owe it to us.

But what did Paul specifically say?



Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Romans 4:4

If it were a debt, then it would be owed him. And if the Bible teaches us anything, it teaches that none of us are owed salvation. The only thing we, as sinners, are owed is condemnation and death.



For the wages of sin is death ...

Romans 6:23.

Notice, it says *wages*, as in something that you earn. If we got what we earned, as sinners, we would all face eternal death, eternal condemnation.

Which is precisely why Paul says that even for a giant of faith like Abraham, a man with many good works - a man who was willing to sacrifice His own son at God's command (Genesis 22) - his salvation still had to be by grace, a gift from God apart from all the good things he does, or has done, even the works of the law.

And if a great man of faith like Abraham needed grace to be saved, what about us, who are hardly as great, but are by nature *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*? Jeremiah 17:9 Of course, it's the same. We need to be counted righteous, reckoned righteous, and we can be, because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HIMSELF

How does this work?

Paul in the above texts quoted the book of Genesis:



Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

It wasn't Abraham's works that made him righteous; it was his faith. But faith in what?

Paul explains:



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is

revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

Romans 3:20-22

God has a law - His law - a good law - the Ten Commandments - but this law does not and cannot bring us salvation. On the contrary, the law is what points out our sin, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin*. The law is what shows us our need of salvation. The law is like a mirror; it might show you the flaws on your face, but the mirror has no power or means to remove them.

That's why *by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight*. Instead, Jesus Christ lived a perfect sinless and righteous life, a life that revealed *the righteousness of God* Himself, and the great news of the gospel is that this righteousness becomes ours by faith, by claiming it for ourselves.

SALVATION BY FAITH

Look at this verse:



Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Romans 3:28

To be justified means to be forgiven, pardoned, accepted. In other words, though you are a sinner, though you have done wrong, when you claim for yourself the righteousness of Jesus, which is the very righteousness of God, then as sinful as your life may have been, you are now counted as

perfect, holy and righteous in God's sight. Not because you really are, but because Jesus really was - and the great provision of grace is that God will accept Christ's righteousness as yours.

And it becomes ours by faith when we place our belief in Him. That is, we have to claim it, accept it, believe it, and rest our hope upon it and nothing else. We must trust that our acceptance with God comes, not from anything that we can do, but only because of what Jesus has done for us.

That is what it means to be *justified by faith*. After all, if we can't do anything to earn it, then how else could we be justified?

OLD NEWS

Here is the heart and soul of the gospel. From the fall of Adam and Eve onward, the message of the Bible is that you can be accepted by God, no matter how wretched your condition, because of what Jesus has done for you.

Your past, your guilt, your deeds - they don't matter. What matters is that, through the grace of Christ who died for your sins, you can stand pardoned, forgiven, justified - not because of what you have done, but despite what you have done. That's the whole point of it all. We are saved, not by our works, but by Jesus' works for us, because Jesus has embodied in Himself the very righteousness of God. This righteousness is offered to each of us. We claim it by faith.

And if the righteousness of God can't save us, what can?

Looking for peace? Want to get beyond guilt? Here is where you can!

And the great news about this good news is that it is old news - news that has existed, as we have seen, even before the foundation of the world. And that news is that God's plan is for each of us to have eternal life in Christ.

Nietzsche was wrong. God is not dead. God is love, and that love is powerfully revealed in the wonderful provision made for us even before time began, the provision that Jesus' perfect life and record can be credited to us, not because we are worthy, but because Jesus is, and God's grace allows that worthiness to be our own when we claim it by faith.

At the heart of this epic story in which we find ourselves, is the accusation by the devil that God is cruel; that He is holding good things back from us; that He is selfish, unfair and unjust.

But wait a minute. Take another look at Jesus, being born, living, and then dying on the cross - for you. Not because He had to, but because He loves you. Does that sound like a cruel and vengeful God? The Christian cross is a declaration that God is love. In the great controversy the devil accuses God of all that he, the devil himself, is! But the cross of Jesus silences that attack - it is the full unveiling of God's amazing grace, for all to see.



NEXT IN THE SERIES:



*Uncover the steps to accept God's rescue offer
and find joy in unconditional acceptance*

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