

Reformation Truths: Saved by Christ Alone - Hebrews 1:1-3:6

There's a story I enjoy about a man who fell into a hole. As he looked up a doctor walked by and he shouted "Hey Doc! Can you help me out!" The Doctor wrote a prescription, threw it into the hole, and walked on.

A little time later, a vicar walked by and the man in the hole shouted "Hey Rev! Can you help me out!" The vicar wrote out a prayer, threw it into the hole, and walked on.

Soon after a friend walked by and the man in the whole shouted "Hey friend! Can you help me out!" The friend didn't say anything when he jumped down into the hole at which point the man who had been in the hole said "what are you doing? Now we both stuck in here!" "Don't worry," said his friend. "I've been in this hole before, and I know the way out."

There are times in life when we need friends like that to give us help or advice, but no friend is good enough to help us with our greatest problem – the problem the Bible describes as sin. Friends can help you with flat tyres, difficult children, money worries, even marriage problems, but they cannot deal with our greatest need. The Bible says not only that our sinful actions, words and thoughts separate us from God, but that outside of Christ we are, at the very core of our being, enemies of God. This is God's world, he's the rightful king, and we are by nature rebels against the King's rightful rule. And as traitors against the king we deserve death and hell.

The hole we inhabit is so deep that no amount of good deeds, or religious devotion or self-sacrificing activities can deal with our sinful heart. No amount of prayer or praise or giving or service can undo our rebellion against God. We've seen that over the last two weeks haven't me. Garry told us that when it comes to saving ourselves it is like we are asleep, and George went further and said that outside of Christ we are spiritually are dead. Sleeping people or dead people do not get themselves out of deep dark holes.

And yet, and yet, the Bible tells us that there is hope. All is not lost because God himself has come to our rescue. We've been reminded that this rescue is by grace alone; it is the free gift of God. We saw last week that it is by faith alone; we cannot earn it by our own efforts. But where must we place our faith if we are going to be rescued and forgiven? Where must we look for salvation?

Well the message of the gospel is that our sin can be dealt with, our fears can be conquered, the power of death can be shattered and eternal life can be ours by God's grace alone, by faith alone when our hope is in Christ alone. Our culture may lump Jesus in with other religious leaders or spiritual gurus: it may mock him in films or adverts: it may ignore him altogether or replace him with Father Christmas or the Easter Bunny or with a sausage roll – and I hope you were outraged by that! - but it is in Christ alone that we have hope!

So, my aim this morning is to magnify Jesus before your eyes and to show you just how great and glorious he truly is. And my purpose in doing that is two-fold: that you might look to no one and nothing else for your salvation, and that you would have greater confidence in speaking of Jesus to a world that desperately needs to know him.

So, please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 1, page 1201 of your church Bibles, and let's take a fresh look at Jesus.

Chapter 1 verses 1 to 3 really nail it don't they! Jesus is "*the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*" When Jesus walked the Earth, people saw what God was like when they looked at Jesus because Jesus is God. It's an unambiguous claim isn't it! Jesus is the one through whom God made everything. Jesus is the one who brings us God's message of hope and salvation. Jesus is the King! The ruler over everything.

It's astonishing therefore that anyone would replace Jesus as the object of their devotion and source of hope yet that's what people try to do today and what many at the time this letter was written were trying to do as well.

Back then, just like today, many people were fixated with angels. Today you can buy angels for your shoulder, angels to go around your neck, angels to sit above your bed, angels to watch over your children and look after your pets! And an increasing number of people look to angels for their peace and security, but why would you look to angels when Jesus is available? As the rest of chapter 1 makes clear, looking to angels instead of Jesus is ridiculous. Why? Well the writer makes two clear points: In heaven Jesus is the one with power and authority and the angels are obeying him! And secondly, whilst Jesus is the one true son of God, who has eternally existed, the angels were created beings. There is no comparison! Fixating on angels instead of Jesus is like settling in for a chat with the Queen's butler when the door to the throne room is open and she is beckoning you in.

But that wasn't the only problem. Flick over to chapter 3 and it seems that some, perhaps those from a Jewish background, were pinning their hopes on Moses instead of Jesus. Now Moses is a huge figure in Judaism and it's likely that the book of the Hebrews was written to a Jewish community, but again, the writer to the Hebrews leaves us in no doubt about how preposterous that is. Moses was an amazing prophet, a great leader and a faithful servant in God's house, but the one with authority over God's house is Jesus! Moses was working for Jesus!

Jesus is greater than Moses and all the prophets. Jesus is far greater than the angels and all heavenly beings. Jesus is God! The one who has all authority and power and might. How can we be tempted to look to someone else apart from him?

If you haven't got an answer to that question the writer of the Hebrews does. He acknowledges in chapter 2 verses 8 that, "*at present we do not see everything subject to Christ.*" And that's true isn't it. We look around the world and we see chaos and carnage and catastrophe. We see leaders not leading, people struggling, and the things of God being trampled underfoot as if they were of no value. And if we keep our eyes on the world, it's easy to think that the claims the Bible makes about Jesus are overblown at best or downright lies at worst. Perhaps it's easier to venerate someone like Moses or one of the saints from ages past, or to focus on angelic beings rather than on God.

But if we take our eyes off Jesus, if we lose sight of who he is, there is a real danger that the brokenness of the world will cause us to drift away from the truth. That's the warning at the beginning of chapter 2. If God's word which came through angels and prophets carried the full authority of God, then how much more the gospel message that came through the Son of God himself! Friends, we must never let ourselves be distracted from focussing on Jesus!

You see the unambiguous testimony of Scripture is that Jesus is our only hope and our only saviour. And what a Saviour he is!

Despite being the second person of the Trinity and worthy of all the praise and worship from angels and the entire creation, chapter 2 verse 9 tells us that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels. In fact, chapter 2:14 tells us that Jesus was made like us. We know this is true, we celebrate it particularly at Christmas, but I wonder if we really grasp the wonder of that statement. Jesus shared in our humanity; the eternally existing Son of God became one of us.

And like all of us Jesus experienced pain, suffering and temptation, chapter 2:18. We read in the gospels how he endured hunger and thirst, sorrow and grief, and how he was betrayed, scourged and crucified. And chapter 2:14 tells us that the eternal son of God died.

I'm not a huge fan of "I'm a celebrity get me out of here!" But I've watched it from time to time. And one of the joys of the program is that we get to see famous people, whose lives are usually lived in comfort and luxury, struggling with basic accommodation, living in close proximity to people they don't know and don't like, and having to do plenty of really unpleasant things!

But magnify that contrast a thousand-fold and we will still do not get close to the distance Jesus travelled from the glory of the Father to the stable in Bethlehem and to the cross of Calvary.

Why did he come? Again, the writer to the Hebrews has the answer for us:

He came that he might taste death for everyone verse 3, that by his death he might pay for our sins, verse 17, and so set us free from the fear and reality of death, verse 15. Jesus left the glory of heaven where he was worshipped by angels, where all authority and power and might belonged to him to come down to this broken world. And here on earth Jesus experienced life with all its struggles and descended into the deepest darkest pit of hell so that sinners like you and me might be forgiven, set free, and given a glorious eternal hope. That's what Jesus did for you. That's what he did for me.

And it doesn't stop there! There's more! Verse 18 tells us that because Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are, he can help us when we are tempted. Why would he do that? Because his rescue mission wasn't just about dealing with our sin and leaving us alone! Jesus purpose was to bring us into God's family as his brothers and sisters. The mission of Jesus was a mission of rescue, redemption and adoption!

In the terminology of the book of Hebrews, Jesus is the greatest prophet, not least because he himself is the greater part of the message. Jesus is the one true priest who puts an end to all other sacrifices and who himself pays the price for our forgiveness. And Jesus is our one true King, the one before whom one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Compared to Jesus the angels, mighty and glorious though they are, do not come close. Compared to Jesus no other Old Testament prophet comes close. Compared to Jesus the saints of old do not come close. Sinners need a saviour! We cannot save ourselves. The angels cannot save us. Local vicars or archbishops or popes cannot save us. The saints of old, even the great apostles and the Virgin Mary, cannot save us. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Krishna, Joseph Smith or Jeremy Corbyn cannot save us! Jesus isn't just the most attractive lifeboat; he is the only lifeboat! The only one who can offer us true salvation, eternal life, full forgiveness, real hope, deep peace and lasting, eternal treasure is Jesus.

So, let me ask you: Is Jesus your saviour or are you trusting in someone or something else? You see it's all very well to know the facts of the gospel, to be able to draw the pictures for 2 Ways to Live or recite the creed, but do you know Jesus as your saviour? Do you know him? Faith is a personal thing in the sense that we must all respond personally to the offer of Jesus, so have you done that yet? Have you seen Jesus

as he truly is? Have you grasped the glorious truths about his finished work on the cross? And more than that, have you come to Jesus humbly and accepted him as your king and your saviour?

You see whilst we may not see the Lordship of Jesus clearly visible when we look at the world around us, the fact remains that he is Lord and that one day even the most fervent opponent of Christ will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord! But they are more than facts. They are an invitation! Jesus is Lord, whether you acknowledge him or not, but the benefits of his life and death and resurrection are only available to those who repent and believe and approach God through faith in Jesus? Have you done that yet? You can today! There is no other name by which you can be saved and I plead with you not to ignore his gracious call.

But if you have done that; if you would say unequivocally that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour then let me encourage you to do some spring cleaning. You see whilst we would know if we stop trusting in Jesus, we can let our admiration for great leaders or the latest spiritual fad or our own godliness and good works draw us away from trusting only in Christ. But Jesus accepts no rivals. Our trust must be in Christ alone!

And that will be evidenced by our lives. Does Jesus have the throne to himself, or does he get relegated from time to time? As Lord of all Jesus deserves nothing less than the prime place in our lives, but as the days go by it's easy to let other things creep in and take first place. Jobs, hobbies, family, even church activities can become so important to us that they can replace Jesus or weaken his authority in our lives. Like the first readers of this letter Don't give them an inch! Remember who Jesus is and what He has done for you, meditate on Christ daily, feed on his word, place yourself again and again at the foot of His cross until your heart responds to his call. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – let us never drift from this glorious truth.

I'm under no illusion about how unwelcome this message is today. Our culture wants to put all religions in the same box and suggest that they are all roads up the same mountain to the same God. Claim that salvation is by Christ alone and you will be called bigoted, intolerant, Islamophobic, perhaps even racist. But intellectually, let alone theologically, there is no other place for us to stand!

If the Bible is true then Jesus is God who came to earth to live and die and rise again that we may be forgiven and have eternal life. Islam says Jesus did not die and was not God. Hinduism says the gods have come to earth many time, not just once, and that Jesus is one of many, many deities. Buddhism says our greatest problem isn't sin but suffering, and modern cults like Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormon's either demand we add to Jesus' work or deny his deity or both. With so many opposing views it's blindingly obvious that not all of them can be right and true! True tolerance isn't about accepting everyone's ideas as equally valid and true, it's allowing those ideas to be expressed in the first place.

So how should we react when people laugh at our faith or argue that our position is intolerant. We respond humbly and gently, pointing out the intellectual folly of what they might call tolerance. But most of all we must point people to Jesus and tell of what he has done for us. Only Jesus saves! Only Jesus can rescue us from our deep, dark pit of sin. We can stand confidently before God only by grace and through faith in Christ alone. And so when we share our faith we must speak of Christ crucified! A stumbling block to many, foolishness to many others, but to those who believe it is the power of God for the salvation of lost souls. May God keep our eyes on the glorious person and work of Christ, our hope and our redeemer, and help us tell abroad his wonderful works.