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KEY ONE: TRUE SALVATION

How can I know that I am really saved?

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street ... About a quarter past 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 I did trust Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. —John Wesley (1703-1791)¹

Unless a man is born again, he will not see the kingdom of heaven. (John 3:3)

JASON FACES JESUS

Jason was a junior at the university and by all accounts a serious, committed follower of Jesus. He accepted Christ at a young age, was raised in a strong Christian home, and when I met him, he was very involved in a campus ministry. He spent regular time in the Word and prayer, led Bible studies, and even went on overseas mission trips. Jason

¹ Entry from *John Wesley's Journal*, May 24, 1738.

wanted to be pushed spiritually, so he asked if I would consider discipling him. We agreed to meet up at a local coffee shop to explore the possibility.

We were sipping our coffee outside on a beautiful sunny day, and I dropped the bomb—the big question. If he didn't answer this correctly, there would be no point in trying to disciple him. *Have you decided to truly make Jesus the Lord of your life?* I asked him. I needed to know if Jason really understood what the Bible means when it says, *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord ... you will be saved (Romans 10:9).*² I asked him pointedly, *Does Jesus get the final say over every area of your life—who you date, who you marry, who your friends are, where you live, what your job should be?* He paused.

As we talked a little more, it became clear that (once again) here was someone who believed he was a committed Christian, but who had missed one of the most fundamental elements of the gospel. Many people have prayed a “sinner’s prayer,” been baptized, attend church, and are involved in ministry (some even become pastors and missionaries), yet they have never made a conscious decision to allow Jesus to rule and reign over *every* aspect of their life. This is a massive problem because, whether they know it or not, if Jesus isn't their Lord, then they themselves are the lord and master of their own lives.

² In the New Testament, saying “Jesus is Lord” (Gk. *kurios*) means that you have submitted in obedience to Him. When a person rightly understands this, there is a word they will apply to themselves (the first disciples all did)—the word is “slave” (Gk. *doulos*). If Jesus is your *kurios*, then you are His *doulos* (*Acts 4:29; Romans 1:1, 6:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22; Galatians 1:10; etc.*). To miss this point is to miss a huge part of the gospel.

Here is a news flash—if you have not accepted Jesus Christ as Savior *and* surrendered to Him as Lord, you very well may be an outsider looking in.³ This is one reason that so many “Christians” in our day have such a substandard spiritual experience. Their “Christianity” simply doesn’t work. God seems distant, the Bible is boring, and their prayers seem to bounce right off the ceiling. This state of affairs leads many to the wrongheaded conclusion that there is something deficient with Christianity itself. The truth is that the problem isn’t with Christianity at all, the problem is with *them*. They have never come to God on the terms that He laid out in Scripture. So before we move on to all the exciting things available to God’s born-again kids, let’s make sure that you, reader, are really on the team.

(By the way, Jason took a week or so to think it over and decided to surrender fully to Jesus. Needless to say, he hasn’t regretted it. He is now discipling others and developing the skills to be a real player in God’s kingdom.)⁴

ME, DECEIVED? NEVER!

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourself. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

³ This point is very troubling for many “Christians,” who will inevitably ask, *Are you saying that Jason was not born again?* I am not making any sort of judgment on the matter—I am just reporting what the Bible says. *Anyone interested in getting to the bottom of this, ask Jason.*

⁴ The first edition of this book was written three years ago, and a lot has happened in Jason’s life since then. He is a founding member and deacon of our new church, The Refuge Fellowship. He completed a seminary degree in theology, and now oversees our church’s discipleship house ministry. He also married a wonderful, godly young woman, and they just had their first child.

According to Jesus, judgment day is going to be a huge shock for many people. Thousands upon thousands of religious folks who sincerely think that they are Christians (“born again,” “saved”) are going to be turned away. With tears in His eyes, Jesus will tell them that they were deceived—they thought they were His, but they were not.

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?” And then I will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:22-23)

The sad fact is that many people who think they are Christians will read that passage of Scripture and say to themselves, *I’m sure glad that Jesus isn’t going to say that to me. I know I got it right.* But how do we know if we got it right? No one who is deceived knows that they are deceived. That’s the thing about deception—it deceives you. It would be a much more intelligent move on our part to say, *Maybe, just maybe, I am one of those deceived people, so I better check it out.* This is precisely why the apostle tells the believers in Corinth to test themselves to see if they are truly in the faith (*2 Corinthians 13:5*). It is vital that we line up our idea of salvation with the New Testament. Do you know for certain that you have come to God on *His* terms?

THE MESSAGE AND THE MIRACLE

One of the greatest moves of God in all of history erupted in the 1700s, when a few young firebrands rediscovered the truth of salvation. This explosion of God’s power has come to be known as The First Great Awakening, and the main movers and shakers of that time were John Wesley (1703-

1791) and his good friend George Whitefield (1714-1770). This kicked off about 200 years of God moving in power on planet earth. Yet today, most Christians know almost nothing about this era. For over two centuries, these old schoolers lit up towns, cities, and sometimes whole countries with fire from heaven.⁵

If you want to have your hair blown back, read the journals of those who experienced the glory, beginning with Wesley and Whitefield. In their case, it looks like a couple of apostles, like Peter and Paul, were dropped into eighteenth-century England and colonial America. The following is a sample from Whitefield's journal:

When my friends were sitting down together, finding the power of the Lord come upon me, I began to speak to them of the things of God. A great alteration was soon discernable in most of the company; their concern gradually increased, till many burst into floods of tears, and one fell upon the ground ... My soul was carried, as it were, out of the body, and I was enabled to wrestle mightily with the Lord in their behalf—He did not let us go without a blessing. The room was filled with cries of those around me, and many, I believe, at that time sought Jesus ... Several were in great agonies of soul, and a Cherokee Indian trader, who was providentially present

⁵ There are tens of thousands of lost and neglected books—journals, biographies, devotional writings, theological works—documenting this amazing period of history. This library can now be resurrected and searched out by anyone with a computer via websites like openlibrary.org, archive.org, and gutenberg.org.

*desired to speak with me, saying, he never saw or felt the like before.*⁶

What Wesley and Whitefield rediscovered and then unleashed on the English-speaking world was the concept that salvation is an event, *as lightning falling from heaven.*⁷ It happens in a moment. You don't need to join a particular church or take a 12-week class. It's not a process, or something you strive to attain. In the Bible, the miracle of salvation happens as soon as a person believes and receives the right message about Jesus Christ.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Check it out for yourself. Salvation is a gift from God, given freely and immediately to anyone who will accept it. *What must I do to be saved?* the Philippian jailer asked the apostle. *Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,* was the simple answer (*Acts 16:30-31*).

Having said that, there are some very specific things you absolutely must believe if that amazing lightning strike called salvation is going to happen to you. Sadly, many

⁶ Quoted from *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, from a few days after his return to Georgia to his arrival at Falmouth* (London: W. Strayhan, 1744), 15-16.

⁷ John Wesley used this expression to describe the immediacy of a true salvation experience. For example, his journal on April 26, 1738, reads, *In the day or two following, I was much confirmed in the "truth that is after godliness" by hearing the experiences of Mr. Hutchins, of Pembroke College, and Mrs. Fox: two living witnesses that God can ... give that faith whereof cometh salvation in a moment, as lightning falling from heaven.*

people today think they've "got it right" and they simply don't. Let's run through the New Testament to make sure we have all our ducks in a row, so to speak, so that you can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are truly saved.

Thankfully, the New Testament makes this crystal clear. There is a very specific message that a person must believe, and when this message is rightly believed and received, a miracle happens in their soul. If you really want to know that you are saved, open up the Bible and search it out for yourself.

This is so important that you can't leave this issue of your salvation up to anyone else—not your grandma, your best friend, or even your pastor or priest. In *Matthew 24:24*, Jesus says that there will be all sorts of people talking all kinds of nonsense, claiming to represent Him: *False Christs and false prophets will arise ... to mislead, if possible, even the chosen ones*. Again, you need to check this out for yourself. Only when a person gets over this hurdle cleanly can they move on to all the other amazing things available to God's kids, like prayer, power, victory over the demonic, and how to hear the voice of God. But first things first—everything stands or falls on what you believe about Jesus.

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

Jesus once asked His disciples, *Who do people say that I am?* His followers filled Him in on the differing views that were swirling around.

He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you

say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13-16)

Virtually every person you meet has an opinion about Jesus. Your philosophy professor has an opinion, the barista at the coffee shop has an opinion, and you have your own opinion. One of the most popular views going today is that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher. Another popular view (particularly in some academic circles) is that Jesus was a zealous, small-time country preacher who was wildly exaggerated by His early followers. All the major world religions have put their own unique spin on Jesus. Muslims teach that Jesus was a prophet who agreed with everything Mohammed said (and Christians distorted His message). Many Hindus believe Jesus is on par with countless other deities, or avatars. Mormons believe He is the brother of Satan. Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is just a created being.

How important is our answer to this question? It's as if all of mankind will ultimately have a final exam with just one question on it—*Who do you say that I am?* That Jesus existed, or was a really great guy, or that He was even a prophet, just won't cut it. Jesus Himself says that our answer to this question is a matter of life and death. Get it right and you win. Get it wrong and you die—not once, but twice (see *Revelation 21:8*). As Jesus put it, *Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (John 8:24)*. What exactly did Jesus mean by that?

The New Testament Is Clear

Let's cut right to the chase here. According to the New Testament, Jesus is God, plain and simple. He put on human

flesh, then died on a cross to save us from our sin. This is all so obvious from the Bible itself that anyone who comes to another conclusion is simply not taking Scripture seriously.

I make known to you the gospel that I preached to you, which you also received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I gave to you as of first importance what I also received, that according to the Scriptures Christ died for our sins, and that He was buried, and that according to the Scriptures He was raised on the third day. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Changing this simple message is unthinkable for anyone who really believes and follows the Bible. The harshest language in the New Testament is reserved for those who try to pervert or obscure it in any way. The apostles themselves said that no one was allowed to tweak or modify it in the slightest, not even them.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we already said, so I now say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse. (Galatians 1:8-9)

Come on, someone might ask, *is it really that obvious? Isn't it possible for intelligent people to read it differently? Isn't it all just a matter of interpretation?* Let's be perfectly clear here. There may be some issues we can debate about when it comes to the Bible (the end times, spiritual gifts, mode of baptism, etc.), but **Who** Jesus is and **What** He did is not debatable. C.S. Lewis (a former agnostic turned Christian) is famous for arguing that for anyone who takes

Jesus's words at face value, there are really only a few options available—liar, lunatic, or Lord. Either He was God, or He was out of His mind.

A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says He is a poached egg — or else He would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁸

Most people would heartily agree that He was neither deluded nor a deceiver, so let's quickly run down those unmistakably clear things Jesus said about Himself (and that His early followers then confirmed) and consider what the implications are for us.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS/THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

The New Testament clearly states Jesus's identity. He was God with skin on, who came to earth to save people from their sin. He died on a cross, rose from the dead, and now sits enthroned in highest heaven as Lord and King of the universe. But to really make sense of His message, we must also believe some things about ourselves—namely, that we are sinners, worthy of God's wrath. If we put all this

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; reis., New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 51-52.

information together, the following points are what we must absolutely believe, and we will be saved.

1. We have all sinned ... *that includes you and me.*
2. Sin makes us worthy of death/separation from God ... *you sin, you die.*
3. Jesus was God in the flesh ... *even His opponents knew this was His claim.*
4. Jesus died for the sins of the world ... *this God-Man died your death for you.*
5. Jesus rose from the dead ... *this validated everything else He said.*
6. Jesus is Lord ... *miss this part, and you are still on the outside looking in.*

1. YOU ARE A SINNER

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
(Romans 3:23)*

Sin is defined by theologians and Bible scholars as *any act that is not in conformity (i.e., agreement) with the will of God.* In short, whenever you do something God doesn't like, you have sinned. God put a little sin detector inside every human being called the conscience, and everyone on earth, even the most wicked, knows full well that they have sinned (*Romans 1:32*).

Sometimes when I share the gospel with someone, they try to convince me that they are a "good person," and based on this premise then argue that they are okay with God. The New Testament comes right out and calls these people *deceived (1 John 1:8)*, so I try to use a little finesse at this

point to get them to abandon that futile argument. There is a technique that I employ to call their bluff ... and it has never failed yet.

Whenever someone says, *I am a good person*, I invite them to play a little imagination game with me. I say, *Pretend with me that somehow I have come into possession of a secret video. It's right here on my phone. On this video, I have a recording of your life's darkest moments—words, deeds, lies, immoral acts, every dark thought.* Then I ask them, *If I had this video, would you still be trying to convince me that you are a good person?*

If I possessed this sort of video on any human being (including you), that person would never be able to look me in the eye again ... and thank God no one has *my* video. No one has ever tried to push their, *I'm a good person*, approach beyond this point. They usually just look at me surprised. I tell them, *No, I can't see into your soul. I just know you are like all the rest of us—a sinner!* As the Bible says, *There is no one who is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10).*

According to Scripture, if a person commits even one sin (like Adam and Eve), they are worthy of death. But the reality is that you and I have a sin rap sheet that could stretch for miles. *Isaiah 6* is an account of someone really being confronted with the state of his sick soul. The prophet basically exclaims, *In light of God's holiness, I am doomed! Doomed!* The fact is, we aren't good people. That the earth hasn't opened up and swallowed every single one of us into hell is a miracle of God's kindness (see *Psalms 130:3*). We are all in a heap of trouble. Below is the portrait the Bible paints of us:

*There is no one righteous, not even one;
There is no one who understands,*

*There is no one who seeks after God;
Everyone has turned aside, together they are useless;
There is no one who does good, there is not even one.
Their throat is an open grave,
They keep deceiving with their tongues,
Snake venom is under their lips;
Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;
Their feet run to shed blood,
Destruction and desolation are in their paths,
And the path of peace they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.
Now we know that everything the law says, it speaks to
those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be
shut and all the world may become accountable to God.
(Romans 3:10-19)*

Embrace this reality, that you are sick beyond any and all human remedy, and we can move on to point #2. If not, you are the deluded person who thinks they are healthy and needs no physician—these were the nuts that even Jesus Himself couldn't crack.

2. YOUR SIN MAKES YOU WORTHY OF DEATH/ SEPARATION FROM GOD

The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

In biblical terms, “death” means separation, being cut off from something or someone. We need to recognize that the sinful things we have done make us worthy of death—being cut off from God. This has always been the way things work. *The soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:20)*. In Genesis, God told our first parents that on the day they sinned, they would be cut off from Him. Just one little sin, and they would die (*Genesis 2:17*). We all know the story. They ate the

forbidden fruit, and they died. Now obviously they didn't drop physically dead on the spot; that is not the primary meaning of "death" in the Bible. Rather, they were cut off from God and cast out of His "Garden of Delights"—Eden.

This state of spiritual death, cut off from the presence of God, is how every single one of us comes into this world. We are born under the rule and reign of Satan, and throughout life, we only get ourselves deeper and deeper into sin and guilt by sinning and sinning and sinning. The apostle Paul explains our desperate plight.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan), the spirit who is now working in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath. (Eph. 2:1-3)

According to the New Testament, we are all basically dead men and women walking. To make matters worse, there is nothing you or I can do to save ourselves. We can't do any sort of good deeds to try and fix our situation ... because we are dead. We are in a condition that we cannot remedy. We walk this world as dead people, cut off from the blessing of a relationship with God, then only have death to look forward to in eternity—the second death.

What a delusion so many of us are under. We love to think of ourselves as pretty good people, but the fact is that by nature we are all selfish, sick, twisted little monsters. We didn't just nibble a little fruit, either—we have lied, cheated, stolen ... and done straight unmentionable things. Even most of the so-called "good deeds" we attempted were ruined by our selfish or proud motives.

Anyone who doesn't understand that they are dark and twisted at the deepest level and worthy of death is living in a delusion and is just not ready for salvation. And note again that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Our guilt can't be undone. Our fundamental problem is this: our sinful behaviors simply flow from what we are at the deepest level. Sin is just the fruit that falls off our tree. We must die—or undergo a miracle of cosmic proportions.

But God, being rich in kindness, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ! (Eph. 2:4-5)

3. JESUS WAS GOD IN THE FLESH

We are not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy, because You, a mere man, claim to be God. (John 10:33)

One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is the Trinity. There is only one God, but within that one essence we call “God,” there exist three distinct and separate Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is not the time or place to go into an explanation or defense of the Trinity, just know that every right-thinking Christian in the history of the world has held this belief. Why? Because it is clearly taught in Scripture.

There is something else that every right-thinking Christian in the history of the world believes—Jesus Christ is the second member of this mysterious three-in-one Triune God. The Son is uncreated, all-powerful, eternal God. This means that before Jesus Christ the Son chose to become a little baby in the manger in Bethlehem, He was the all-powerful Creator of untold billions of galaxies, the Sustainer

of the universe, Ruler and Judge of all ... yet for some mind-boggling reason, He decided to take on human flesh and become a man (*Phil 2:5-10*).

If you read through the Bible, you will occasionally find people who figure out exactly who Jesus really is—God with skin on. They fall down and worship Him and He doesn't stop them. They say things like, *He is greater than I am, because He existed before me (John 1:30)*, and, *I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandal (John 1:27)*. Sometimes they come right out and say it in a way that cannot be missed—*My Lord and my God! (John 20:28)*.

Jesus Himself made it clear (for anyone with *eyes to see*) that He was God. He said things like, *Before Abraham was born, I Am (John 8:58)*. Even His enemies knew exactly what He was doing. He was claiming to be God, and this is why they would pick up stones to kill Him. On one occasion, they left no doubt as to their complaint against Him: *You, a mere man, claim to be God (John 10:33)*.

The authors of the New Testament affirmed that Jesus was God again and again throughout their writings.

Christ Jesus ... being in very nature God, did not regard equality with God something to be held on to, but emptied Himself, taking the nature of a servant and being made in the likeness of man. (Philippians 2:5-7)

He is the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15)

He (the Son) is the brightness of His (the Father's) glory and the exact representation of His nature. (Hebrews 1:3)

Let's review: 1. You are a sinner, 2. You are worthy of death, and 3. Jesus was God with skin on. Now we are all set for things to really come together. Why did God take on

human flesh? To save our helpless, hopeless, dead, eternally damned souls, of course.

4. JESUS PAID THE PENALTY OF SIN FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Read the Bible carefully from beginning to end, and it becomes perfectly clear that this was God's plan all along. God knew the mess we were going to get in before He even created us, and He had the solution all mapped out. Before the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the world, it was determined that the second member of the Trinity, the Son, would pay for the sins of humanity. He would be the once-for-all sacrifice, paying the penalty for all sin for all time. God announced this through His prophets centuries before Jesus's birth. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah explained Jesus's death mission in vivid detail. (Did you catch that? This was written 700 years before Jesus was born. *Mind boggling!*)

He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our sins; the punishment that brought us peace fell on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. All of us have gone astray like sheep, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD placed on Him the sin of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. (Isaiah 53:5-7)

This God-Man was miraculously conceived in the womb of a virgin, lived in obscurity for 30 years, then exploded onto the scene of history for three and a half short years. Why did He come? The answer is simple and clear—to die. This is why when John the Baptist first sees Jesus, he cries out, *Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! (John 1:29)*. Jesus came to pay the penalty for your sins and mine.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; for by His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

He has appeared at the pinnacle moment of all history to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself ... Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. (Hebrews 9:26-28)

Someone had to pay the penalty for our sin, and the Trinity had it planned out from eternity past exactly how They were going to do it. *Brilliant!* Because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, God can now forgive us and remove the curse of death from us. On the cross, all the world's sins were placed upon Jesus, and He took death for us all.

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Because of what Jesus has done, not only can we have our slate wiped clean forever we also have the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to our account. There

is nothing we can do to earn this or add to it. Don't try to improve on it, either. It's an accomplished fact, a gift just waiting for you to take. All we have to do is believe and receive.

Someone hearing this message for the first time might ask questions like, *How could infinite God possibly become a man? How can God die? How is it possible for one sacrifice to pay the penalty for the entire world?*

To be perfectly honest, there is a lot about this whole salvation thing I cannot understand. But think about this—I don't need to understand everything about how an airplane works before I get on one. I don't need to understand everything about brain surgery before I let a skilled doctor put the knife to me. All I need to know is that this is how God did it, and if we believe this message, a miracle happens inside of us—*as lightning falling from heaven!*

We still may have some reservations, so to really drive home the point that Jesus is who He said He is, and that He accomplished what He said He was going to accomplish, God put an exclamation point on the whole operation. The next component of the salvation message is God's final seal, His finishing touch. To confirm it all, and to let us all know in no uncertain terms that Jesus successfully accomplished our salvation, *He rose from the dead.*

5. JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Religious leaders down through the ages have made a lot of big claims, but who besides Jesus ever made a claim as big as this?

I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down by My own decision. I have

*authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.
(John 10:17-18)*

Any good historian knows that there is overwhelming evidence that the life and death of Jesus is historical fact. Even ancient non-Christian sources acknowledge this.⁹ What many people don't realize, however, is that the evidence for the *resurrection* of Jesus is also absolutely overwhelming. In fact, some really smart folks in recent years have set out to disprove it, only to end up joining the team. They became Christians as a result of their research.¹⁰

The resurrection is the final argument that Jesus is God, that He took care of our sin problem, our death problem, and made a way for us to forever be at peace with God. A whole lot of people at the time of Jesus said that they saw Him *alive* after His crucifixion. Many of them were so convinced they had seen Him that they shed their blood, refusing to renounce their claim. Why would so many of them willingly die if it weren't true?

He appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of them are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (1 Corinthians 15:5-7)

⁹ See the writings of early non-Christian historians Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3, and Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

¹⁰ People like Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); and Josh MacDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972).

The word *gospel* literally means “good news,” and what better news is there than this? *It’s over! Finished! Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins, and we can all be forgiven.* God confirmed it by raising Jesus from the dead.

He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

But there is still one more *massive* detail we need to cover. It’s that whole *Lord* issue we began the chapter with. This may be the key point more people are missing than any other.

6. JESUS IS LORD!

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord ... you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Now we arrive at the point that so many in our time are fuzzy on, one more absolutely necessary aspect of a true salvation experience—you need to confess with your mouth, *Jesus is Lord*, and you need to understand what this means. In simple terms, it means that you step off the throne of your heart and give your Creator back His rightful place. Anyone who desires to truly be saved/born again/regenerated must understand this—part of the whole deal is giving themselves fully, unreservedly to the One who gave Himself fully and unreservedly for them.

Just so that no one misses the point, let me put it this way: If you rightly *confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9)*, there is now a word you will happily apply to yourself. The word is “slave,” in the Greek *doulos*. Check it out in the Bible. This is how the biblical authors often signed their letters—*Paul, a slave ...*, *James, a slave ...*,

Peter, a slave. If you never had any intention of obeying Him, of being His *doulos*, then He is not your Lord.

Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” but don’t do what I ask? (Luke 6:46)

Our Creator didn’t become a man, sweat drops of blood, suffer rejection and persecution, get flogged to bloody ribbons, carry the cruel cross up Skull Hill, and then drink the cup of God’s wrath just so we could have a “get out of hell free” card. He saved us so that we would stop living like destructive, selfish little terrorists, scratching and clawing our way through life. He died for us in order to break sin’s rule and reign over us. He set us free so that we could serve Him in holiness and love. Don’t just *call* him *Lord*, *surrender* to Him as Lord.

In our crazy human minds, we think that we will be giving up something precious if we become Jesus’s slave. We are afraid of losing our freedom, but the fact is that we will never know what freedom is until we abandon ourselves fully to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. *You will know the truth and the truth will make you free (John 8:32)*. Without question, God is an infinitely better Lord over me than I could ever be over myself. We will never find out who we really are or what life is all about until we let the Author of life take His rightful place on the throne of our heart. If you are willing to do this one final thing—*Confess Jesus as Lord*—you are in.

MAKING SURE YOU REALLY “GOT IT”

If you follow the New Testament prescription for salvation, you will experience a literal miracle—something supernatural takes place inside of you. Believe that Jesus is

God with skin on, who took your sins upon Himself then died in your place, who rose from the dead and is now Lord—*your* Lord—and you will be born again. Sometimes when people are born again, they are unaware that a miracle has just occurred inside them, but something amazing has happened, nonetheless. One of the most mind-bending aspects of this miracle is that the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, actually moves in and takes up permanent residence inside of you.

Don't you know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

He saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, Whom He richly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:5-6)

New Christians can be completely unaware of this holy invasion—the Holy Spirit's presence inside of them—but there will be definite evidence that will prove He is there and prove that they are saved. There will be a new hunger for the things of God, a new ability to understand spiritual truth, and a new power to live out the Christian life. This evidence is proof positive that a person has truly been saved. (Turn to Appendix 1 in the back for an eight-point diagnostic test taken straight from the book of *1 John*.)

MOVING ON FROM HERE

This chapter was interested in just one thing—making sure that you, reader, are really born again. Jesus said, *Unless a man is born again, he will not see the kingdom of heaven*

(John 3:3). The remaining pages are full of incredible truths about the blessings and benefits available to God's true, born-again children—things like peace of mind, victory over sin, prayer that works, supernatural power for service, etc. But if you want in on the action, you have to make sure you are really in. You can call it a lot of different things (saved, regenerated, sanctified, justified, etc.), but what we are talking about is simply this—being made right with God. The sad fact is that many so-called “Christians” today are not experiencing much action in their spiritual life because they never really read the contract, so to speak. For anyone who does it right—accepts Jesus Christ as Savior and submits to Him as Lord—buckle up! You just hit the ignition switch.