

## 9) Jesus Christ, Part 3

### Jesus Christ, Saviour

In what way is Jesus not just a wonderful teacher of God's will and way, a prophet, a sage and a holy man, but also a divine saviour of humanity? This has been and continues to be a core confession of Christianity. We follow Jesus not just to learn the right way to live but to be "redeemed" (liberated) and "saved" (healed toward wholeness) through him beginning in this world and into the next.

In Part 2 of the Jesus Christ section we reflected on Jesus' divinity and humanity and noted that both divine and human aspects of Jesus' being are essential to understanding the way we Christians, following the bible, understand salvation. Jesus has to be divine in order to proclaim and embody God's saving love for us even when we have failed to reciprocate such love with our often anti-love ways of being (sin). On the cross Jesus proclaims and embodies God's forgiveness. But Jesus also has to be human because only a human saviour can be with us and all victims of anti-love abuse, injustice and neglect. How can God forgive a perpetrator unless God also steps alongside the victim? And how can God empower a victim to rise up to freedom and resurrection to new life unless God is one with victims in every way in their deepest darkness embodying the way of forgiveness and the pursuit of justice free from revenge? This is what God is and does in Jesus Christ.

But too often in Christianity and for many of us as we have been taught growing up, what happens on the cross in Jesus is explained in all kinds of ways that are harmful. Referencing certain scriptures interpreted in a certain way, we're told that Jesus had to die on a cross because death is the price of sin. We humans are sinners deserving of everlasting damnation because of our sinfulness. God is holy and will never accept atonement (making things right) for sin unless someone pays the price for it with their life. And Jesus is the perfect candidate because he is pure and innocent, and as divine can accomplish what we flawed and sinful humans cannot. Jesus carries the weight of our sin and dies in our place. He dies a gruesome death and God's anger at our sin is pacified with Jesus' blood. Our forgiveness is Jesus offering his life for ours, giving us a free pass to freedom and salvation. But there's a catch. We have to ask for forgiveness and give our hearts to Jesus, otherwise, we're on God's bad side. Jesus' death on the cross in our place only applies if we embrace our sinfulness in need of redemption and salvation through repentance.

OK, but why would God demand such a price for sin? Isn't God more loving than the best of us humans? If we humans can forgive even one who has done the most terrible things, why can't God (a question the biblical Job also asks)? If we as humans can eliminate capital punishment as a means of punishing a criminal and develop more humane ways to make them accountable why would God be less humane and demand not only our blood but threaten us with eternal damnation?

So then, when we hear or even use a verse from the apostle Paul like: “Jesus died for our sins”, we need to be careful how we understand it. Jesus died because he spoke the truth to power, in a world of injustice, in a world where all of us are caught up in systems and relations of injustice, hurt and harm, as perpetrators, as victims, and as a combination of both depending on the circumstance or relationship. As God, Jesus speaks and lives out forgiveness. As God, Jesus stand with all victims and shines a light at the injustice and harm done to every one of God’s precious creatures. As humans with our all-to-often broken relationships with each other and the earth, we too are included in this offer of love as forgiveness on the cross and a call to freedom and salvation through a love more powerful than bitterness, hate or indifference. To be a Christian is to embrace such forgiveness, inspiring us to keep repenting toward growth in love, letting go and overcoming those anti-love dimensions of our lives. It’s a lifelong journey that will take us through this life and into the next.

So then, Jesus is our saviour and his path to the cross is in total alignment with his Abba God. He will not turn away from declaring that the rulers and systems of the world are anti-God and doomed to judgement before a higher justice. He will be crucified because that’s what power-hungry rulers do to any who proclaim truth to power. He will be crucified alongside all victims of injustice and by so doing shines a divine light on all that’s wrong in our world. But he will also proclaim and embody divine forgiveness love to all who embrace it and who seek out the healing of sin through repentance. We repent as perpetrators and participants in flawed and broken systems, and we are empowered to rise up as victims of those same systems because Jesus is with us, within us and through us continues to embody God’s love in the world.

Doesn’t this make so much more sense of Jesus as saviour through the cross? What do you think?