

# “HOW COULD JESUS SAVE US IF HE WAS JUST A MAN?”

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Trinitarians suggest that believing “Jesus is God” is a salvation issue. As one representative spokesperson framed it, if Jesus was “just a man he couldn’t possibly live a sinless life or be enough to pay for all our sin”. Thus, according to the trinitarian, failure to believe that Jesus is God will cost you your eternal salvation. If true, this is serious stuff indeed!

To back up this person’s conviction, **Psalm 49: 7, 15** was quoted: **No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him ... But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for He will receive me (NASB)**. The NRSV has **verse 7** differently: **Truly, no ransom avails for one’s life, there is no price one can give to God for it**, and says in its footnotes that, **“another reading is “no one can ransom a brother”**.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the modern reader influenced by trinitarian doctrine might be excused for thinking this passage teaches that **“just a man”** is powerless to redeem and to eternally save. Thus, Jesus had to be more than a “mere man” and was in fact, the God-man. Is this the message of Psalm 49?

## CONTEXT OF THE PSALM

It is not good exegetical practice to take a verse out of its context. So let’s see what **Psalm 49** is all about. Does it really teach that the world can only be redeemed by a man who is really God?

When we read the psalm right through, it becomes obvious it is an encouragement to the godly who are being haunted by the power and influence of the rich and powerful. The problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the seeming unfairness of life for the righteous, is indeed a common theme in the psalms.<sup>1</sup>

How does the troubled psalmist work his way through to a hopeful solution? Well, he launches into typical Hebrew thinking. He employs **“a proverb”** and a **“riddle”** and he puts it to music on his **“harp” (v. 4)**. His psalm is born!

He calls on **“all you peoples who live in this world”** to listen up to his **“wisdom” (v. 1-3)**. (A far more civil approach than rushing off to steal from the rich, to kill the oppressor to settle scores and bring some kind of social equality!) Yes, his godly wisdom is for rich and poor, high and low alike --- universally applicable for Jew and Gentile.<sup>2</sup>

The next verses from **7 through to 12** state the obvious and empirically observed fact that death is universal upon all mankind. This means that no man has an advantage over any other man. You cannot use your money or your social privilege to **“live forever”**. Living in opulence or being able to “pull strings” is no help when facing death.

Inexorably **“the Pit” (Sheol)** will welcome all with its open arms. This is why, **“No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him ...and no payment is ever enough that he should live on forever and not see decay” (vs. 7-9)**. Nobody can cheat death!

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. **Ps. 73**.

<sup>2</sup> All nations of the world captures a rare poetic Hebrew word (**haled**).

Let's stop right there for a moment and take a breath! Let's ask our trinitarian question: Will believing "Jesus is God" be enough to stop any person from dying and going down to the grave? Does any serious Bible reader really believe the question even entered the psalmist's mind? It is so out-of-context is it not?

A man may be an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, a theist, a deist, a Buddhist, a Hindu, an Islamist, a Christian, or the proverbial 'Callithumpian', but when it comes to dying, believing that "Jesus is God" can't stave off the inevitable. No matter how orthodox a man's belief, he is still going to die! No amount of money **is ever enough that he should live on forever and not see decay!** No matter how much you may love your brother, no amount of money can redeem him from that destiny!

Death is the great leveller. **"Wise men die" and "the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others (v. 10).** The only house they will live in for **"endless generations"** will be **"their tombs" (v. 11).** Sure, the rich may try to gain some kind of immortality by leaving behind lavish monuments, and ornate estates with their names left for posterity, but the truth still remains that **"man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish" (v. 12).**

The psalmist's dilemma is almost solved! He is no longer haunted by the apparent advantages the wicked and the godless may seem to enjoy in this life. His conclusion is that one fate overtakes all. To trust in riches, and power, and prestige is useless. Indeed, man does not even have an advantage over the animals who also all die!

The psalmist then goes on to personify death. Like a shepherd death leads all who trust in their money to the slaughter; **This is the fate of those who trust in themselves ... like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them (v. 13-14).**

Of course, the Bible does not teach that riches *per se* are evil --- just that to rely on them and to be insensitive and oppressive with their use is. Indeed, those who have only cared for themselves have a rude awakening on the way. But those who trust in God have a new **"morning"** coming (v. 14).

So, the psalmist encourages himself with the knowledge that **God will redeem my life from the grave, He will surely take me to Himself (v. 15).** Yes, even the OT the saints believed in the coming resurrection from the dead and fellowship with the Living God in the Age to Come! No money can buy this privilege and hope! Thus,

**The triumph of faith gives no ground to fear what is transitory. Riches, splendour, praise of self, or praise of humankind makes no difference in the grave. The tragedy of wealth may well be that it gives a false sense of security and life. <sup>3</sup>**

Conclusion so far? The context of **Psalm 49** has *absolutely nothing* to say about whether it's necessary for Jesus to be God to redeem mankind. As we've already noted, even if you do believe that Jesus is God this won't save you from dying (should the Lord tarry)!

### **BIG PROBLEM!**

Now, if you do happen to believe that Jesus had to be God in order to redeem mankind from eternal destruction, have you considered the huge difficulty this raises for your theology? Ask yourself how it's possible for the "Incarnate God" to *die* on the cross to redeem us?

Does not the Bible teach that God alone is "immortal" (**1 Tim. 6:16**)? By definition --- if words are to have any meaning --- to be immortal means you are unable to die. If Jesus is God then he could **not** die

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 426.

and we would have no redemption on that score anyway!

“Oh, but Greg”, my trinitarian friends will say, “God prepared a body for Jesus and so the sinless human nature of Jesus was able to die and redeem us!” Oh really? Do you mean to tell me that only the human nature of Jesus died and the immortal God nature did not die? Are you saying that you can therefore separate the so-called “two natures” of Jesus, that his human nature experienced what his other so-called God nature did not experience?

Popular Reformed and Trinitarian [R.C. Sproul](#) affirms the Second person of the Trinity was spared real death, and that we should “[shrink in horror](#)” from the idea that the divine entity died on the cross! <sup>4</sup>

[Other evangelical outlets agree: “death is something that is experienced only by the human nature ... the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, left the body He temporarily inhabited on Earth, but His divine nature did not die, nor could it.” Indeed this opinion has been rampant amongst evangelical scholars: “On the cross the divine spiritual nature left the body it had possessed.”](#) <sup>5</sup>

So, Jesus died but he didn't really die?! Where is your eternal redemption now?

Many trinitarians do not realise that at the ‘orthodox’ Council of Ephesus in 431 AD the notion that the human and divine natures of Christ were separated within his person was pronounced as heretical. This became known as the [Nestorian Heresy](#). A certain Nestorius was anathematised because he said Mary was the “Mother of Christ” but not the “Mother of God”, indicating that Mary was the mother only of the human nature but not the God nature of Jesus.

Thus, the Nestorian controversy had Christians debating how Jesus could simultaneously be composed of two opposite natures within his single person. The ingenious Greek-philosophised solution was “the hypostatic union” of the two natures in one person. Which is to say, whatever happened to one nature in Jesus, also happened to the other!?

Therefore, on this “orthodox” pronouncement, it was not only the humanity of Jesus that was crucified, but the Logos --- *God Himself!* (Which of course raises another conundrum: If the Divine Person could suffer and die, why did the Logos need to take on human nature in the first place? Jesus’ humanity turns out to be a *facade!*!)

Trinitarian ‘orthodoxy’ believes that the human and divine natures of Christ are united in such a way that one side cannot undergo an experience while the other nature is completely segregated and unaffected, which would effectively create two Christs!

[Therefore, the \*one person\* of Jesus cannot have a God in only one nature but not in the other.](#) <sup>6</sup>

To separate the “two natures” is to declare ourselves heretics by “orthodoxy’s” own pronouncements! My trinitarian friends must surely see this is nothing other than pure, unadulterated Gnosticism which the apostles railed against??? The apostles state it was **the Son of God who died on the cross for our redemption!** (Rom. 5:10; 8:32). It was not a “nature” that died, it was a person --- the Son who himself dies.

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<sup>4</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Did God Die on the Cross?* Ligonier Ministries, 14 April 2014. Web. 27 October 2014.

<sup>5</sup> “*Did God Die?*” Got Questions Ministries, Web. 16 December, 2014 and *The Monthly Religions Magazine*, Vol. 15 edited by Frederic Dan Huntingdon as quoted by Kegan A. Chandler in *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology*, Restoration Fellowship, Ga. USA, 2016, pp 97-98

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, *The God of Jesus*, p 318

The simple Bible fact is that if “Jesus is God” and his so-called God-nature did not die, how on this theory is our redemption secured? ***So, it's the trinitarian who has no redemption if Jesus is God!*** Either our salvation comes through God's anointed and appointed man --- i.e. a man must be the agent of our redemption --- or we have no salvation!

### THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS.

But we still have not fully answered our question. How can the death of one finite man --- albeit a perfect and sinless man --- fully atone for all mankind? Let me answer in the words of an ex-trinitarian pastor who founded many Chinese speaking churches around the world before his death as an aged man a few years ago;

The error of this kind of reasoning became evident to me when I perceived the truth in John 3: 14-15, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” This refers to the incident recorded in Numbers 21: 7-9 in which the people were dying from bites of the poisonous snakes.

Jesus compares this incident to *faith* in him: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever *believes* in him may have eternal life” (John 3: 14-15). The point here should be extremely clear: the saving of thousands who looked to the brass serpent had nothing whatever to do with anything inherent in that serpent --- they were saved by *God* through *faith* in His promise that whoever looked would be saved: “Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live ‘” (Num. 21:8).

The next verse confirms that those who had the faith to look lived. The same is true for all those who are looking to Jesus for salvation through *faith* (Heb. 12: 1-2). It is *God's* saving power in Christ which saves them from sin and death. It is therefore, not something inherent in the constitution of Christ that saves, but it is God our Father (Yahweh) who saves us in and through Christ.

For salvation is entirely God's work; it is by faith and through grace alone ... We fail to properly present Biblical soteriology (doctrine of salvation) if we fail to make it clear that God our Father is the ultimate or fundamental author of our salvation while Jesus is the mediating, or instrumental, agent of our salvation. <sup>7</sup>

Certainly Jesus' sacrificial death has infinite merit before his God and Father, for God accepted and vindicated his perfect offering by raising him up from the dead. By raising Jesus up to be the first immortalised man ever, God declared to the world that Jesus' offering is sufficient to redeem all who look to Him in faith. He is declared to be **the Lamb of God** (i.e. the sacrifice that God Himself provided) **who takes away the sin of the world** (Jn. 1: 29).

This is why Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the **one mediator between God men** and yet *remains* as **the man Christ Jesus** even now in his exaltation (1 Tim. 2:5). At the right hand of the majesty on High he is waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. God now **commands all men everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man He has appointed,** having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1).

### CONCLUSION OF THE PSALMIST'S DILEMMA

To imagine the psalmist is laying out a post-Nicene doctrine that only a man who is God is qualified to redeem men, is contextually anachronistic. The Bible knows nothing of an invented “God-man”! (Try

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Chang, *The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism*, Xlibri, 2009, pp 173-174 (Emphases original).

finding that term in your Bible!)

When the Psalmist says, **No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him (Ps. 49: 7,12)** he is however, saying no man can thwart the inevitability of his own death, nor the death of his loved one(s). At the end of the day, all men, no matter what their temporal circumstances or advantages, cannot redeem themselves or their loved ones from death.

Truth be known though, if we want to know how God has redeemed mankind, the Bible actually teaches that the grace of God and the gift of salvation comes through **the one man, Jesus Messiah, and abounds to many (Rom. 5: 12, 15)**.

You can take it as Gospel truth right from your Bible then, that believing Jesus is God is definitely not a salvation issue!