

My Story and the Gospel of Jesus

By Douglas Groothuis

I encourage you to consider the claims of the one who revolutionized my life twenty-five years ago. During my first year in college I studied many different philosophies and religions only to find myself very confused and hopeless. Then I began to give Christianity a chance after speaking with some very alive and compassionate Christians in a college dorm in Boulder. (I had gone to Sunday School for a few years and had a vague belief in God, but I had never taken the issues raised by Jesus Christ very seriously.) Before leaving Colorado I began to read books by Christians and to think seriously about the whole issue of the existence of God and my relationship to him.

When I returned to Anchorage in the summer of 1976 I spoke with many of my old high-school friends who had become Christians while I was away in school in Colorado. Many of them had gotten off of drugs and had a new sense of purpose and meaning in life. As I sensed my own need for answers in life, I then began to read the Bible and seek God as best as I knew how. After a few weeks of searching and struggling, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ at a meeting in June. I realized that I was lost without God in my life and that I needed him. I didn't know very much about the Bible at the time, but I prayed that Christ would come into my life to forgive my sins and to be my Lord and Savior. I committed myself to Jesus Christ publicly.

My life did not change immediately, but over a few months I saw the difference that Christ was making in my life. I was no longer interested in drugs or alcohol (I wasn't addicted to either, but I was abusing both), I had a desire to understand the Bible, and God began to give me a peace and joy I had never before experienced.

Having known Christ for twenty-five years, I've seen how he has led me and protected me. I have been involved in teaching, preaching, and writing about the truth of Christianity every since I graduated from college in 1979. God has led me to write five books which defend the truth of Christianity against the challenges of the New Age movement and other non-Christian viewpoints. I haven't shied away from the intellectual challenges brought to bear against the claims of Jesus Christ; as a philosophy professor and as a public speaker I must deal with them. And I enjoy doing so.

I remain convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was and is God in the flesh, that he lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, that he rose from the dead three days later (Easter) and that he always lives to love and forgive and make new those who come to him in simple faith and trust.

The beauty and wonder of the message of Jesus is that God cared so much about his creation that he sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the penalty of our wrongdoing. God knows that we fall short of his perfect standard of goodness. God knows that we have violated our own consciences and that we cannot undo the wrong we have thought and done. He knows we can't deliver ourselves from our own moral guilt before him. That is precisely why Jesus came into the world. Without a vital relationship

with Jesus, we have no hope for forgiveness and heaven.

One of my favorite stories from the Gospels is that of the criminals who were crucified next to Jesus. One criminal mocked Jesus and challenged him to free himself from the cross if he was God's Son. He was rebuked by the other criminal who said that Jesus had done nothing wrong but they, as thieves, were getting what they deserved. The repentant criminal then turned to Jesus who was bleeding and suffering on the cross and said "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus' response was amazing. He said, "I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (This event is described in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23, verses 26-43. I hope you will get out a Bible and thoughtfully consider it.)

The repentant criminal recognized that he was a sinner in the presence of a sinless man. He realized he was guilty before God and man. But he called out to Jesus in faith. Jesus saw the thief's sincere faith and assured him of paradise with him that very day. All that Jesus required of the man was a recognition of his own sin and sincere faith in Jesus himself. That's all. It wasn't too late for this pathetic man. He lived and died as a criminal, but he would spend eternity as a saint with God! Why? It is because he reached out to Jesus. Jesus did not refuse him. This is God's grace in action, his mercy manifested in space-time history.

The Bible teaches that while we may not be thieves, we have all sinned against God and have fallen short of his perfect standards. We are all guilty before him. You can't find a single culture on the face of the earth that doesn't attempt to deal with guilt and shame in one way or another. We can try to cover it up, we can pretend it isn't there, or we can try to do enough good things to make up for the bad ones. But none of this works. Neither do religious observations. Our guilt remains and God knows it. Only faith in what Christ has done can give us forgiveness and the assurance of heaven. Let me give you a few verses from the Bible on this. Jesus said:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. The Gospel of John, chapter 3, verses, 16-18.

Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 6.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Book of Romans, chapter 5, verses 6-8.

These and so many other verses show that God is concerned about our eternal condition. This is not a fairy tale. My research has convinced me that the Bible is a historically reliable and philosophically credible book. More than that, the Jesus of the Bible, the living Christ, has transformed the lives of countless millions around the world. He changed my life and he can change your life as well. It's never too late to choose to follow him by admitting your need for forgiveness and by turning to him in simple faith that he can reconcile you to God through his death on the cross.

We don't need the Bible to tell us that these bodies of ours are decaying and that we all must die. But there is something else ahead. To those who come to the loving Christ by faith there awaits an eternity of joy and peace in the presence of God himself. He promised it.

But the Bible also speaks of those who are lost because they refuse to admit their failures, to turn away from wrongdoing, and to turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior. We can either come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior in this life or we will know him as Judge in the next (which means Hell). No one can merit heaven by their own deeds. We all come up far short. Without Christ as our Savior we are lost and condemned. There is no other way.

I know I've spoken strongly but I do it out of conviction, compassion, and a sense of urgency for your own well-being. You've got nothing to lose by asking God to reveal himself to you and by actively seeking him by reading the Bible, especially the New Testament. But remember, if Christ is who the Bible says he is (as I believe with all my mind and heart), and you fail to accept him, the consequences are frightening.

When I became a Christian in 1976 I said a simple prayer, a prayer that God heard and honored. I hope you will pray this yourself. God will hear and honor it if comes from your heart.

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned against you. I'm guilty and lost without you. I'm sorry, Lord. I ask you to forgive me of my sin and to come into my life as Lord and Savior. I will follow you and obey you Lord, as you give me the strength. I turn from my sinful ways and turn toward your way of life. Thank you for your love, your forgiveness, and for heaven.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

I will be praying that you pray this prayer. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Douglas Groothuis

Douglas Groothuis (Ph.D., University of Oregon) is professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, where he has served since 1993. He has written ten books, including *On Pascal* and *On Jesus* (both in the Wadsworth Philosophers Series), and he served as contributing editor for *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World*.

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