

For dying people who have no confidence that they are going to heaven.

First, some good news: There is hope for you even now!

On the day Jesus was crucified, two thieves were crucified with Him, one on His left and one on His right. Both of them were mocking Jesus at first. But eventually, one of them had a change of heart.

One of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)

It is not too late for you but you must have a change of heart just like the thief had a change of heart. You must first agree with God about His right to rule over you and about your sin. There is another story in the Bible about a man who had a change of heart about these things. He is compared to another man who falsely thought God accepted him on the basis of his good deeds.

Jesus spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

God's perfect righteousness makes it impossible for Him to receive people who think or hope they are good enough to be accepted by God. If a person was good enough, then God would owe that person wages for his good deeds. He would deserve honor or glory. But God says that He will not share His glory with anyone. It would be unrighteous for Him to do so.

I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

God has made a way of salvation but it cannot be earned or God would owe whoever earned it. So, the Bible says, *"By grace are we saved through faith, not of works lest any man boast" (Ephesians 2:9).*

God has declared that the only thing that is owed to us is eternal punishment in hell. That is the only thing we have earned. If you are willing to come to God His way, consider what He has declared about Himself and about you. Then, believe and accept His declaration. Following are the things God has declared to us in His Word, the Bible.

1. *Because of who God is and what He has done, all people have a duty to Him.*

There is no other God. He answers to nobody!

"That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the LORD, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:6).

God created all things and therefore owns all things, including you. This means that He alone has the right to rule over your life (not you). God has made Himself known through the creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handywork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun" (Psalm 19:1-4^{KJV})

The creation proves that God is all-powerful and therefore has all authority. As a result, He expects all people everywhere to acknowledge Him as their Ruler. God has also made His desires known to people by placing a conscience in them that convicts them when they violate His will.

"For when the Gentiles, who not having the Law, by nature do the things of the Law, these, who do not have the Law, are a law unto themselves, who show forth the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, their thoughts either accusing or even defending themselves" (Romans 2:14-15).

God commands that all people love, honor, obey and fear Him in response to all that He has done for them.

“Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Think about how you have responded to what the Almighty God has done. Please take this seriously because God holds your life in His hands, and He is very serious about these matters.

2. All people (including you) have failed to respond properly to the things that God has shown through the creation and conscience.

People should fear and respect God. Instead, all people have lived as if God does not care how they live. God says that people purposely block the truth about Him out of their minds and He takes offense at it. People (including you) tend to live for themselves rather than for Him. They do not give Him the credit He deserves for all the things He does for them. Living this way causes people to form distorted thoughts about God and themselves.

People tend to compare themselves with other people to measure their own goodness rather than consider what God thinks about them. But God has a different assessment. God says that all people are guilty of sexual immorality, wickedness, greed, murderous treatment of others, deceit, being haters of God, proud, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful.

“Seeing that they did not see fit to have God in their knowledge, God gave them over into a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, malice, gossip, slander, God-hating, violence, arrogance, boasting, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, not trustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful, who, knowing about God’s justice, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do they but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32).

God declares that in themselves, there are none who are righteous. There are none that He considers good. Try to imagine what this must look like to God. He graciously brought us into existence and provides for us. He makes Himself known to us through creation and through conscience. Instead of fearing Him, people live as if He does not even exist. God considers this to be hostile toward Him (like enemies).

3. Because God is a righteous judge, He must punish all people who die with their sins. (Hell awaits.)

God’s wrath is stored up against every human unless and until they repent and receive God’s salvation.

*“Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil, and cannot look on iniquity”
(Habakkuk 1:13a).*

*“To show that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no
unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92:15).*

*“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit
the wicked: the LORD hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm,
and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3).*

God is a righteous judge who must punish each and every sin! If He were to let just one sin go unpunished, He would cease to be absolute in His justice. (He would not be righteous!)

You might ask, “But can’t our good deeds make up for our sins?” This thought assumes God can excuse your sins. It makes Him out to be less than absolute in His righteousness. The Bible says that it is impossible to make up for our past sins by trying to do things that are good.

*“By the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified before God for through
the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).*

Our past sins already make us unacceptable to the holy God. (No sin can come into God’s presence.) Also, if you think that your good deeds can make you acceptable to God, it shows that you do not yet comprehend just how vile your sins are to God.

You need to realize that God considers you guilty of vile sin. Jesus said that if you ever have gotten mad at someone or called them a name, you are guilty of murder within your heart.

*(Jesus said): “I say to you that whoever is angry toward his brother
without cause is liable to judgment. Whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca,’
is liable to the governing authority. Whoever calls someone a fool is
liable to be cast into hell fire” (Matthew 5:22).*

If you ever looked upon another human with desire, you have committed adultery with them in your heart.

*(Jesus said): I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has
already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).*

Thousands of times throughout your life you have done things that you knew God did not want you to do but you did it anyway. Every time you did this, you took God off His rightful throne and you sat down in it as if you have the right to be king. In this way, you have made yourself out to be God, the same sin that Satan committed. You might now be thinking, “If all of this is true, what hope is there for anyone since everyone has sinned?” If you are wondering this, you are

finally understanding important truth. All people are rightly condemned and on their own, are not able to make themselves right with God!

4. At great cost to Himself, God made a righteous way to save guilty sinners.

All people are rightly condemned and on their own, are not able to make themselves right with God! But because God is merciful, He made a righteous way for guilty sinners to be saved! To remain perfectly just, God had to punish all the sin. So, He sent His Son Jesus to take the punishment that we deserve!

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

If Jesus had not died in our place like this, everyone who ever lived would have to go to hell forever because of God’s absolute righteousness! But when Jesus died on the cross, God accepted Jesus’ death as full payment for our sins. God demonstrated His acceptance of it by raising Jesus from the dead within three days. Now, *“Everyone who believes into Him (and continues to do so) receives remission of sins” (Acts 10:43)*. Because He died as a substitute sacrifice for our sins, God can offer salvation while upholding perfect righteousness because every sin was punished.

Your part in this is to trust Him. You must come to agreement with God about your sin. You must agree that you are not good enough to be accepted by Him. Better yet, you must agree that because of your crimes against the Holy God, you deserve to go to hell forever. If you agree with God about these things, you can come just like the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus. You can come just like the tax collector who said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

Jesus invites you to come this way. He said, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30)*. For more, go to **“Dying Saint, Take Courage.”**