

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

AS PRESENTED BY ILLUSIONIST: STEVEN RYAN

The Bible begins with the story of creation. God created Man for fellowship and communication. He formed Man to be His perfect creation, but in order to be that perfect creation, God had to give Man a free will, the ability to choose. Mankind took that freewill and chose to go his own, independent way from God. This is what the Bible means by the word, Sin. Sin is basically our choice, our decision to go our own way from God. It is saying by word or action, "Hey, God, You go your way and I'll go mine. I don't need you, God. I can run my own life." This is what mankind chose to do. The results were disastrous. What was once a growing relationship was now shattered. It was like a great chasm formed between a Holy God and a sinful man. And ever since that time, man has continually tried to reach God through good works, religion, philosophy, but he always falls short. For "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

But God did not leave us there. 2000 years ago, He came to earth in the form of a man. He called everyone to follow Him and His message, but most, especially his own people, rejected him. The Jewish religious leaders finally trumped-up false charges against Him and with an agreement between Herod and Pilate, He was sentenced to death by crucifixion.

The crucifixion has been described as the cruelest, most hideous form of death ever devised in the history of mankind. It was designed to give the greatest amount of pain over the greatest amount of time before death.

After Jesus was apprehended, He was beaten, mocked and flogged, then His battered body was nailed to a cross to die. His feet were nailed to the upright and His hands were nailed to the crossbar. As He hung there, He cried out, "Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing." And He died. To confirm His death a Roman soldier drew his spear and thrust it into His side causing blood and water to flow.

Jesus' friends and relatives then took Him down from the cross and wrapped Him in burial clothes which were strips of cloth combined with a compound of aloes and myrrh which would form a heavy thick cast around His body. A separate piece of cloth was laid over his head. He was then placed in a borrowed tomb. A two-ton stone was rolled over the entrance of the tomb. The seal of Caesar was then placed on the tomb. The penalty for anyone to tamper with that seal was death.

In addition to the grave clothes, the two-ton stone and the seal of Caesar, sixteen Roman soldiers were stationed around the tomb to prevent anyone from trying to steal the body. Yet in spite of all these precautions, three days later Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead. And all that was left was the empty shell of His grave clothes.

By Christ's death and resurrection, He was able to remove the barrier between us and God. But as you see from this illustration, God and Man still do not have the relationship that God intended us to have.

Jesus then made numerous appearances. First appearing to His followers and later to crowds of over 500 people. Then before leaving the earth He said to His followers, "It is best for you that I go away because if I do not go away, the Holy Spirit of God will not come unto you." In other words, Jesus Christ had *physically* left the Earth so that He could be present *spiritually* within the life of each person who is willing to receive Him.

John 1:12 says, "But to as many as have received Him, to them He gave the right to be called the Children of God." What does it mean to receive? Receiving Christ involves turning from our own independent way and towards God. Trusting Him to come into our lives, to change our lives and to make us everything He created us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead is not enough. And it is not is it necessary to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ through faith as an act of our free will, our own ability to choose.

If you would like to come into this relationship with God, I would invite you to say a short prayer similar to the one I prayed that night a number of years ago when I invited Jesus Christ to come into my life and change my life. There is no specific prayer to pray. Prayer is not magic. It is simply talking with God. If this prayer matches the desire of your heart, I invite you to repeat it silently after me.

Dear Jesus, I need you. I open the door of my life and invite you in. Forgive my sin and make my life everything you created me to be. In Your name I pray, Amen.

If you've never prayed this prayer before, I would invite you to do a couple of things. First, I would invite you to read the book of John. It is the fourth book in the New Testament of the Bible. It talks about the life of Christ and His relevance to our own lives today. Secondly, if you do not have a church home, may I recommend this church as your future church home so you can learn more about your faith. And finally, I would encourage you after the show to talk to me, the pastor or a member of this church so that we can help you and encourage you to grow in this exciting relationship with God.

Thank you so much for having me. I hope you have not only been entertained, but that you might have seen and heard something that has been a great inspiration to you. Thank you and may God bless!

Note: I realize that there has been great debate over free will and predestination. My personal belief is similar to marriage, He chose us, and we choose Him. The reason I emphasize free will is because that is what I believe a non-Christians will understand. As they grow in their faith, they will later see God's sovereign work in their lives.

This presentation has been inspired by many Christians in my life. André Kole, Pastor Stephen Will and Lew Potter. And is based on Cru's "Four Spiritual Laws".