

His Name was Dysmas

His Name was Dysmas. Years ago I wrote about the thief on the cross and how I had met him. Not physically obviously but a spiritual meeting where-by I could not shake thinking about him, the conversation with Jesus, the entire scene was at the forefront of my mind for weeks. At the time I incorrectly concluded that after having engaged in both personal and corporate Bible study for years one would have expected to see mention of his name somewhere, but alas not. This past summer I was reading a book titled [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah](#) and there it was! His name was Dysmas, and I am still taken aback by all that transpired that day between three men and a cross.

Amazingly there are a growing number of churches that no longer display the cross. The argument is that it's offensive in today's society. Guess what... the cross *is* an offense. It's an offense because people do not want to be reminded of their sinful nature and it directly confronts the evil that is becoming so prevalent in our society.

From A.W. Tozer in his book [The Radical Cross](#)

“In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross. If he refuses the cross he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of [Mansoul](#) and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar, but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility.”

Just a very few weeks ago our church had a speaker who is an active participant in the persecuted church in China. Having been imprisoned and brutalized multiple times for sharing the Gospel in her country, this woman named Sarah spoke something similar to Tozer's remark: “Many people want Jesus but they don't want the cross. You cannot separate Jesus from the cross”.

Award winning author and a nationally recognized pollster for the “Church” and founder of the Barna group, [George Barna](#) has released a study compiling decades of statistics sighting two different groups inside of Christianity as we see it today. Those two groups are the **Captive** versus **Casual** Christians.

Casual Christianity	Captive Christianity
The lives of Casual Christians are defined by their desire to please God, family and other people while extracting as much enjoyment and comfort from the world.	The lives of Captive Christians are defined by their faith, their worldview is built around their core spiritual beliefs and resultant values. They have a biblical world view
For Casuals, <u>success</u> is balancing everything just right so that they are able to maximize their opportunities and joys in life without undermining their perceived relationship with God and others.	For Captives, <u>success</u> is obedience to God, as demonstrated by consistently serving Christ and carrying out His commands and principles.
Casuals are about moderation in all things	Captives are about extreme devotion to their God regardless of the worldly consequences.

So where do you stand? 80% of Americans claim to be Christians however by a ratio of 2:1 they are Casual. Their Christianity does not affect their lives in the workplace, their marriages, or their lives and activities in the public square. They have a secular world view. IF... 80% of American's were really Christians and had a Biblical world view, we would not have abortion on demand, we would not have 2% of the society dictating what is now the acceptance of the LGBT agenda and gay marriages, and the emergence of gender confusion and a litany of other societal problems.

A great deal of the problem stems from our biblical illiteracy. Many revere the Bible, but do not read it, and it is not taught in any of the mainstream denominations. Read from maybe, but taught exegetically... No. Fewer than half the adults can name all four Gospels. 60% cannot name all 10 commandments, and have no idea where they are in the Bible. 82% believe "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse. The majority of adults think the Bible teaches that the most important thing is to take care of one's family. 12% think Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. 50% of graduating seniors in high school thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. No wonder our society compromised on the issue of homosexuality they have no context by which they can postulate it being wrong.

I say all this in an attempt at a wakeup call. This is a question for you regardless of where you think you stand. Are you really a Christian? I want you to objectively evaluate your Christianity as I share the good news. If you believe, tell me why. Is it because you

go to the right church? Is it because you read your Bible and you pray? It's because you belong to the correct religion, right? Every religion, and when I say every religion I mean *every* religion, is man's attempt to give you a list of things to say, perform, or engage in, to hopefully win favor with God.... and that is counter to what scripture teaches. It's not about that, it's about the gospel. It's not about a religion, it's about a relationship.

People talk about the gospel but have no idea what it is. The word gospel means good news. The "good news" of the gospel is telling you what you are being saved from. You're being saved from God's anger as God is a righteous judge and every sin we commit has to be paid for. You will pay for them yourself when you die and spend eternity in punishment, or you can repent and believe in the atonement provided by Jesus Christ on the cross and spend eternity in Heaven.

We need to ditch the veneer of our Christianity. It's not about good works, it's about what Christ did for us. We get all wrapped up in what we can do to earn HIS favor. Guess what, you can't. If you could, *you'd get the glory* and that is not what the Gospel is. Many of you think if you trust in Christ and work real hard you'll get to heaven, you struggle with the idea that Christ did all the work and you did nothing. You want to have religion the old fashioned way, you want to earn it... you can't. You can't perfect your performance and win approval before God.

As I share the Gospel, I have asked a number of people "are you going to heaven when you die"? The answers vary, but run along the lines of "I'm tryin'", "I'm pretty sure", "I'm workin my way there", "I hope so". The bottom line is if you're "hoping" so... then you have no hope at all. If you're not willing to adjust your view of the gospel, if you're not willing to adjust how it is you think you get there, then you're not ready!

If you believe in Jesus and you believe in what He said, then the reality is that people are going to end up in one of two places and you ought to be very afraid of getting the *wrong address*. 150,000 people leave the earth every day, that's 105 a minute or 6,316 every hour. Many of us are looking down the corridor of life and have more days behind us than in front. So we are a bit more cognizant of our "day" being a reality. Whether you believe any of this or not, does not change it. Hebrews 9:27 *it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.*

Jesus talked about hell more than heaven, and there are some very popular myths around hell, as well. There are plenty of heretical books in your Christian book stores pedaling these myths so you can feel comfortable about your Casual Christianity. Let's look at a few:

Myth 1. *God wouldn't judge anyone* - Scripture is replete with all manner of promises of judgment for the unrighteous.

Myth 2. *He wouldn't do that now... He's mellowed* - Scripture says God is the same yesterday today and tomorrow.

Myth 3. *Hell = annihilation* - this myth is that when you die it's simply, lights out. God just annihilates you and you are no more. Sorry, but scripture very plainly talks about a conscious reality of anguish day and night that never ends... a wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Myth 4. I'll get a second chance – Purgatory is a false hope that mainstream religion gives to people. Read the account of Lazarus and the beggar in [Luke 16:19-31](#) specifically verse 26 ... *between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*"

Myth 5. It can't be that bad - "Hey we'll party with the devil it can't be all that bad". See [Luke 13:28](#) "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."

The great preacher [Charles Spurgeon](#) said "It is shocking to reflect that a change in the weather has more effect on some men's lives than the dread alternative of heaven or hell."

The gospel is a message of trust and that trust must go beyond so as to combine it with faith. God has hidden the gospel from the wise and the learned and reveals it to the humble... the penitent heart of a man, woman, or child that has been given the faith gift to believe and decide to trust HIM. It's not just saying "I believe", because the demons believe in God and tremble [James 2:19](#). But I'm not seeing much faith in any demons so they're not a good example of belief in Christ Jesus.

Once you have been given the faith gift to believe and you willingly submit, you must repent. That's a word you've seen your entire life but what does it mean? A biblical definition is *a change of mind that results in a change of action*, and it's impossible to truly and fully change your mind without that causing a change in action. However you can't repent of your own accord; it is a faith gift *from* God as no man chooses God.

Jesus was VERY clear about repentance in [Luke 13:3](#) Unless you repent you will all perish... that's pretty matter of fact. Repentance is not a work that earns salvation; however repentance unto salvation does result in works. Another stumbling block, are the many works based religions that offer the hope of salvation through works.

You don't do good works to get to Christ; you do works because of the change he does in you, so stop trying to earn it. Again, you cannot perfect your performance and win approval before God.

Here is the equation most people cling to: You put your trust in Christ and work real hard and you'll get to heaven. This is symbolized by one religion as purgatory, where-by you undergo punishment because your life wasn't good enough. That's entirely contrary to the Gospel, which says you can receive a pardon for your sin if you... what? If you trust in Christ. What kind of pardon?... a full pardon.

Back to our starting place with Dysmas, the penitent thief on the cross; did Jesus say to him "you lying thieving criminal, you've lived a reprobate sinful life and you're going to have to be punished for a long time, but someday you'll get out". No Jesus looked at Dysmas and said today... "Today you will be with me in paradise," Jesus paid the price and that's the message of the gospel! It's not about good works; it's about what Jesus did on the cross.

I know you get steamed if you hear some murderous lifelong convict on death row who places his trust in Jesus' work at the cross and he gets to go to heaven and you say "How can that be?... I can't accept that". Guess what, the grace gift that saves him is the same grace that saves you. You struggle with Jesus doing all the work and you nothing. Jesus gets all the credit and you.... none! The Bible says for by grace you are saved... Saved from what? God's wrath. God promised in [Ephesians 2: 8-9](#) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Today is the day of salvation. Salvation is in the future, but scripture speaks of it in the present tense. You buy a ticket for a great event be it a sporting event or concert or where ever your interest lay. Say you're going to the super bowl, you buy that ticket in advance. You don't need it today, but one day you will... and if it's the Day of Judgment and you get to the gate and you don't have that ticket... it's too late. Today is the day of salvation, [1John 5:11](#) ...and this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [1Peter 1:3](#) says in his great mercy He has caused us to be born again to a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

So what's the bottom line? You ask God for the grace gift to believe. You repent of your sins. God works in your life to create a new work in you; you change the way you think, the way you act, the way you speak...does it happen instantly?... no, but for me it was quick and God continues to do a work in me. Repentance doesn't mean there will be an immediate end to our sinning. It does mean, though, that we'll never again live at peace with our sins.

Read the Bible and obey it. *Sin will keep you from the Bible or the Bible will keep you from sin.* Cute saying aside, Jesus warns you in His own words In [Mathew 7:13,14](#) Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Enter by the narrow gate, that's the life of living as the Lord would have you live, that's the Captive Christians life. The Casual Christian will enter by the wide way that leads to destruction. The narrow gate is hard and few who find it. 255 million people or 80% of the population in the United States claim to be Christians. Most of those are headed down the wide easy gate that leads to destruction..... many will stand before Jesus on that day and hear him say [Mathew 7:21](#) Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [Mathew 7:23](#) 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

It's a free gift....FREE. Dysmas received it. You can too. There is no magic incantation, no sacraments to perform, no religious rites...It's FREE. All you have to do is ask God to give you a heart to believe, cry out in your heart that you want to be saved... saved from the wrath of eternal damnation. The Bible says in [2 Peter 3:9](#) The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, **not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.** God does not want you to be lost.... Even now as you finish reading this, right now, ask God for HIS salvation. If you don't believe, tell Him so, ask Him to help you in your unbelief. You have EVERYTHING to lose and a new life to gain.