

Agnostics, Cruel Bigots & Cynical People

Message 03 of the series, "Jesus Saves"

"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them all." 1 Timothy 1:15 (NLT)

I. Jesus came into the world to save sinners like Pontius Pilate.

- a. Pilate needed saving because he was an agnostic who was apathetic about truth.

Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime." John 18:33-38 (NLT)

Note: Jesus came so we can know the truth. "Jesus said to the people who believed in him, 'You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" John 8:31-32 (NLT)

"I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth." John 17:14-17 (NLT)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

John 14:6 (NLT)

- b. Pilate needed saving because he was a weak leader who valued power above all else.

(Pilate) took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin."

John 19:7-11 (NLT)

Note: Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. He came to save our souls, NOT to seek political power.

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" Matthew 16:26 (NLT)

"...pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone."

1 Timothy 2:1-6 (NLT)

- c. Pilate needed saving because he was a cynic who made decisions based on what benefitted him most.

"Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.' When they said this, Pilate... turned Jesus over to them to be crucified." John 19:12-16 (NLT)

Note: Pilate knew he was doing wrong. "...as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.'" Matthew 27:19 (NLT)

II. Jesus came into the world to save sinners like the Roman soldiers.

Note: The Roman soldiers were cruel bigots who believed that “might makes right.”

“Some of the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters and called out the entire regiment. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’ And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.” Matthew 27:27-31 (NLT)

Note: Jesus came to forgive and save cruel people, NOT get even. “When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.” Luke 23:33-34 (NLT)

Life Application: Jesus wants us to forgive people who mistreat us and pray for their salvation.

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:43-45 (NLT)

Note: Love and undeserved kindness are powerful tools in opening closed hearts and minds. “When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, ‘This man truly was the Son of God!’” Mark 15:39 (NLT)

“Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.”
1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

III. Jesus came into the world to save sinners like me.

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?’” Matthew 16:24-26 (NLT)

- Do I believe truth can be known? Do I trust God’s Word?
- Do I want power and control over my life more than I want God’s will to be done in my life?
- Do I make decisions based on what benefits me most?
- Do I pray for cruel and closed-minded people asking God to forgive and save them?
- Do I pray for peace in our government so that I can share the Good News with more people?

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17 (NLT)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions

1. What is the typical approach believers have toward someone who is agnostic? Would you list those conversations as positive or negative?
2. At Centerpoint we say that a great way to have a relationship with the lost is by following the 3rd Pathway: Become Aware; Commit to Prayer; Show you Care; and Be Ready to Share. What do you think it means to 'show you care', and do you think this step has significance or value?
3. Read Luke 6:27-36. How do you respond to your enemies?
4. Read Luke 23:44-49. Why do you think that this hard war veteran Roman officer responded to Jesus like this? In your opinion, how should a believer handle difficulties and persecution in this life (with an unbeliever observing)?
5. Read Matthew 28:18-20. What do these statements from Jesus mean to you? How important is this 'task', and what should it look like?
6. Read Ephesians 4:17-32. In this passage there are several statements of 'don't do this, but do this instead'. How many can you pick out? Which ones stand out to you and why?
7. Read 2 Peter 1:1-4. What enables us to live a godly life in the midst of life's struggles that would bring glory to God? Have you ever considered that you can share in the divine nature of God right now because of the promises He has given you? How does this thought impact your understanding of what God is doing for you?

Quotations to Consider:

"Everyone - pantheist, atheist, skeptic, polytheist - has to answer these questions: 'Where did I come from? What is life's meaning? How do I define right from wrong and what happens to me when I die?' Those are the fulcrum points of our existence." Ravi Zacharias

"It is a grand mistake to think of being great without goodness and I pronounce it as certain that there was never a truly great man that was not at the same time truly virtuous." Benjamin Franklin

"Happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected." George Washington

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." Abraham Lincoln

"A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education." Theodore Roosevelt