

### Who will be saved?

When people use the word 'saved' they're talking about people who ask Jesus to be in charge of their life. It's talking about people who are Christians in their whole life, not just 'Christian' in name!

I once heard someone speak about a verse in the Bible that has caused some confusion to different people. The confusion ends up in a way of seeing things called 'universalism.'

In this idea (called a 'doctrine'), some Christians believe that everyone on the earth will be 'saved' (made right with God and be in eternity with him). They argue that many verses in the Bible seem to point to that fact that everyone will just go to heaven and be with Jesus without them doing anything. This is not true. We'll look at these verses and see what the Bible actually says. It is really important to know what the Bible really says because it affects what we do in our lives.

This can be a tricky issue to think about especially if people have lost family, so we just need to be sensitive. We can work to understand the things that God has shown us in the Bible. But we don't understand everything.

### John 12.23-36

"Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk

while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them."

## So what does this all mean?!

In John 12, Jesus was speaking about his death and even hinting towards how it would happen. He was letting those around know about his specific death and the impact it would have. Jesus let people know that unless he died, life would not be able to grow up around him. He described himself as a 'kernel of wheat' falling to the ground to die. But the result would be many seeds.

Jesus then went on to describe the characteristics of the people who would be like those 'seeds.' They would hate their life compared to following him – this means they put Jesus first above anything and everything. A follower of Jesus is shown to be someone who will serve him and be wherever he is. If we say we follow Jesus and don't act like him, don't do what he says – then we are hypocrites. We must be who we say we are and be like the one we follow – Jesus. He will help us with this by the Holy Spirit as we can't do it on our own!!

In verse 32, Jesus then says, "*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.*" The Bible tells us Jesus said this to show the kind of death he would experience. Interestingly, in the Greek, the word 'man' is not present. Perhaps a more accurate way of looking at this would be: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all unto myself." Jesus is saying that when he dies, he will draw all to himself. Some people say this means that because Jesus died, he made everyone in the world right with him so that everyone will be saved and be in eternity with him. However, this is totally wrong and it ignores much of the rest of the Bible.

If you draw people to you, it means just that. It means people are attracted to you, drawn to you. It doesn't mean anything else. The Greek word means 'to drag', it does not mean 'to save from sins'!! So Jesus draws people to himself, but it does not mean that all will be saved.

John 3.14-15 adds something to this, saying:

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (in him)."

This refers back to Numbers 21 where the people had sinned and God caused the people to die. After Moses prayed to God, God had Moses make and then lift up a serpent made of brass on a pole so that people who looked at it would live. This parallels Jesus on the Cross. This verse is very significant because it tells us that everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life. It does not say that everyone will believe in Jesus, it doesn't say that everyone will be saved. There is a condition – that we must 'believe' in him. The Greek for 'believe' means to 'have faith, commit, to put their trust with.'

Back to John 12, Jesus himself continues to talk about the kinds of people who will be drawn to himself, making it clear that not everyone will be: *“Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”* Jesus also spoke about the darkness. Clearly, in order to be in the light, you have to put your trust in the light. Jesus identified this light in John 9.5, saying *“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* So to be in the light, we have to be in Jesus. To be in Jesus, we have to put our trust in Jesus!

One day, we will all stand before God. What does this mean? It means that God will ‘interview’ every single person about their life. Make sure that you have trusted in the light – Jesus – so your ‘interview’ will go well !!

On the Cross, Jesus paid the price for everything – he drew all things to himself. So now in what people call the ‘Great Exchange’, if we accept Jesus, he takes all our sin and we have all things (in him). This doesn’t mean we don’t mess up and do wrong, but it does mean that Jesus has done his part. Our part is to respond to what God has done!

## 1 Timothy 2.1-6

*“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.”*

Those who believe everyone will be saved, also wrongly use this part of the Bible and take it out of context with the rest of 1 Timothy and other Bible verses. Clearly it is God’s will that all people be saved – he made us in his image, sent his only son to die for us! We know that in order to do so, we have to ‘come to a knowledge of the truth’. This is something that only God can reveal to us – John 6.44:

*“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

But has everyone that has ever lived been saved? No. We know that even from the ministry of Jesus that not all Jews believed in Jesus – how much more is this the case in our experience. John 12.37:

*“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they (the Jews) still would not believe in him.”*

In the ministry of Paul the Apostle, not everyone believed in the message about Jesus. Acts 28.24:

*“Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.”*

Jesus gave himself as a ransom (he paid the price) for every man to be restored to God. Sin put a gap between man and God, which only Jesus could ‘mediate’ and make right. But not every person will be saved, as we have been given free will by God to decide. John 3.36 says:

*“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

The Bible makes it very clear that people have rejected God and will reject God. If every person were to come to faith, what is the purpose of judgement and of hell? This should inspire us to live for God and be witnesses for him to the people around us every day.

## A prayer

*Jesus, I thank you that you died on the cross to set me free from sin. I know that I have done things wrong and ask you to forgive me. I throw off all the bad stuff from my past. Come into my life and take charge of everything. I give all that I am to you. I ask you to change me and make me a new person through you. Jesus I believe that you rose again from the dead and now I can have life and eternal life in you. Thank you. Amen!*

If you prayed this, tell someone you prayed this. Let 2 or 3 people know that you have given your life to Jesus. Now get a Bible that you can understand (there are loads of good ones in Christian book shops or on Amazon – like the NIV, the Youth Bible, The Message, the Passion Translation) and get hooked in to a good church who teach the Bible, will look after you and support you. Get praying to God – it's just talking to him and letting him speak to you.

## Final thoughts

We know that the Bible doesn't actually contradict itself – though sometimes it may appear to (we just need to dig a bit deeper for what it's actually saying). We know that Jesus was speaking the truth, and we know that all the Bible is useful (2 Timothy 3.16). So we have to realise that verses like John 12 and 1 Timothy 2 must be set within the context of the rest of the Bible and the books in which they are written.

There are loads of parts of the Bible that show that not everyone will be saved. This may not be easy to think about, but it is true.

Jesus himself was clear that he is the way and the truth. No-one gets to heaven except through Jesus. So the first condition is that we need Jesus to get to heaven. There is no other route. Being good doesn't help you, being of any other faith doesn't help. All roads do not lead to God!

Some people then argue that yes we know Jesus is the way, but Jesus has made a way for everyone through his sacrifice, so therefore everyone will inevitably be saved! But this is also not true. It is true that because of the sacrifice of Jesus, there is the possibility of everyone being saved. But people have to make an active choice. Romans is a fantastic book of the Bible that explains a lot of this. It's quite complex sometimes, but many things are very clear. Romans 10 says:

**"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."**

So we can only come to faith in Jesus when we confess Jesus is Lord and believe it with the heart. The heart and mouth (and your mind) have to line up and agree that you believe in Jesus! Romans 3.21-24 agrees with this:

But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

The Message

This is just saying that now we are made right with God because of Jesus. In the past (Old Testament), the people of Israel had to follow loads of rules. But now, we are made right with God through faith in Jesus – all those people who believe in Jesus and have faith in him. This is the condition!

In the Old Testament, we have heard of Noah's Ark. God brought a judgement on the earth because there was massive levels of evil in everybody. He had Abraham act – he had to build an ark. Then, himself and his family had to get into the ark. That way they were saved from destruction. Not everyone got in the ark. Anyone who says that everyone will be saved is totally wrong and the Bible does not say this. What they have done is taken Bible verses out of context and ended up with an idea that is totally wrong. The truth is that only those who put their faith in Jesus during their life are guaranteed to be saved.

## Tricky question

But what about people with low intelligence levels, people who are on medical equipment to live and those who have never heard about Jesus?

One thing I know about God is that he is just and he is right. He is Holy and pure. The Bible tells us that Jesus will judge, but he will judge fairly. We don't know everything, but we know that God will not simply punish people because of where they were born (perhaps never having heard the Bible) or because of the circumstances of their life (being born with low intelligence for example). God is completely fair and we don't need to worry about him not being just and being right.