

Too Good to Be True

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Introduction

When the women who discovered the empty tomb of the Lord brought the news back to the apostles, they were at first incredulous, labeling it “idle talk” (Luke 24:8–11). This provoked Peter and John to race to the tomb to find it empty as reported (John 20:3–7). Soon afterward Jesus joined the two disciples who were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, eventually revealing His identity to them Luke 24:13, 30–31). They immediately retraced their steps to Jerusalem, reporting their marvelous experience to the apostles and others gathered with them and testifying with certainty that the Christ was risen (vv.33–35).

While they were discussing this astounding phenomenon (in spite of Jesus’ numerous clear predictions of the resurrection!), He appeared in their midst, quieting their fears by inviting them to touch Him and see that He was not merely an apparition (vv. 36–40). Luke then records their reaction: “They...disbelieved for joy, and wondered... (v. 41). They obviously still had difficulty believing what their eyes, ears, and hands were telling them, yet they were overcome with joy and wonderment. In other words, the Lord’s resurrection seemed “just too good to be true!”

Yet it most certainly was true. His resurrection was prophesied ten centuries before it occurred (Psa. 16:8–10; Acts. 2:29–35). It was attested by His appearance to unimpeachable witnesses on several occasions, one of which involved over five hundred people (1 Cor. 15:5–8). Try as they might, skeptics, critics, and unbelievers have never been able to explain the empty tomb apart from the simple account of the New Testament writers – “Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4). “He [God] hath raised him [the Christ] from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

In the resurrection lies the foundation of the Christian religion and therefore the hope of the Christian both for now and forever: God “begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3); “And if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). While the resurrection of the Lord is the very cornerstone of the only true religion (there could have been no Christianity without it), it somewhat symbolizes the entire gamut of God’s wonderful gifts to mankind, and especially to His children. In all of this there are so many things about which we are tempted to say, they are “just too good to be true,” but as sure as the Lord’s resurrection is true, so are they.

Grace

God's grace upon pitiful sinners is the central theme of the Bible. Grace is God's bestowal of undeserved favor upon us. God has made His favor (and the salvation it provides) available to mankind universally through the death of His Son (Tit. 2:11-14). He did this not because of our worthiness or because we had somehow placed Him under obligation toward us, but "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), "the righteous [died] for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Thus any and all who are saved at last will be saved by the grace of God, rather than by their own goodness or merit (Eph. 2:5-9). It is no exaggeration therefore to speak and sing of the "amazing" grace of God, a blessing that is almost "too good to be true," but is.

Mercy

As sinners who have gone beyond and/or fallen short of God's revealed will in the New Testament, we deserve death, the awful wages the sin-master pays (Rom. 6:23). While physical death came upon all men as a consequence of sin (Rom. 5:12), the "death" of Romans 6:23 is one that we earn by our sins, and it is far worse. It consists of eternal separation from God in the abyss of Hell – the "second death" (Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8).

God's mercy enters here. Whereas grace is God's bestowal of undeserved favor, mercy is God's suspension of deserved punishment. Grace and mercy are therefore somewhat two sides of the same coin. But for God's mercy, the whole lot of mankind would suffer forever in Hell, Satan's unending house of horrors. As with grace, so with mercy – God extends it not because of our merit, but because of His kindness and love (Tit. 3:4-5).

This release of sinners from the punishment we deserve is possible only because Christ was qualified and willing to be our sin offering: "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). Only by this means (i.e., accepting the death of His sinless Son as the propitiation for our sins) could God be both just (requiring the penalty for sin), and still justify (pronounce righteous) the sinner (Rom. 3:26). Because of God's wonderful mercy His redeemed people will be able to hear His Son say to us, "Well done," rather than "Depart from me." Even a moment's sober reflection bids us to evaluate God's mercy as "just too good to be true," but it is true.

Salvation

God's provision of salvation for His sinful creation grew out of his grace and mercy, and it also sounds "too good to be true." He began planning this provision even before He created us. He foresaw our awful plight – the condemnation we would bring upon ourselves through

sin. Seeing our helplessness to live perfectly free from sin and its condemnation, in His love, He “drew salvation’s plan.” This involved a Redeemer because men could not redeem themselves from sin. By a sinless One the sinful ones would be saved. He thus planned to send (and sent) One Who would be perfect and who could satisfy His just law that unredeemed sinners must die. “Ye were redeemed...with precious blood...even the blood of Christ: who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world...” (1 Pet. 1:18–20).

He providentially worked out His plan through the ages, and then, “when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son” to redeem men from sin (Gal. 4:4). The Son paid the price for sin that we did not have the ability to pay. “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. ...Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5–6).

Jesus of Nazareth came as both the unique Son of God and Son of man. The pre-incarnate “Word became flesh” as the Holy Spirit implanted the sacred seed in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:31–35). Paternally Jesus was God, possessing all of the attributes of Godhood. Maternally He was man, susceptible to all of the pains, sorrows, and temptations of manhood, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). That the Godhead went to such great pains and great lengths to save us is almost too good to be true, but it most certainly is.

The Church

The church was a part of God’s plan from the moment He began formulating the scheme of man’s redemption. It was never a substitute, second thought, or emergency measure to cover some alleged failure of God’s plan for His Son’s kingdom. Rather, it is the Son’s kingdom (Mat. 16:18–19; Col. 1:13). Paul declared that the church is “according to the eternal purpose which he [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). As “the house[hold] of God” (1 Tim. 3:15) the church is made up of God’s children, who become such when they are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). This occurs when they obey God’s plan of salvation (Acts 2:37–38, 41, 47). The church is God’s depository of those who have been forgiven of their sins through their response to the grace of God.

Christ purchased the church with His pure blood (Acts 20:28), and He wants her to remain pure, without sin-stain or blemish, as did her bridegroom (Eph. 5:25–27). It is a sacred and exalted privilege to be a part of that which meant and means so much to the sinless Second person of the Godhead. The church He built (Mat. 16:18) and it alone is that which He will save

when He returns to take the redeemed to their final heavenly home (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 5:23; cf. Mat. 15:13). It is a wonderful haven from a world of wickedness and worry, built not for angels or lower animal forms, but entirely for men. By becoming a part of the church and by living in the church so as to glorify God, the Son of God will save us eternally, which seems almost “too good to be true,” but which is as sure as God Himself.

Plan of Salvation

The Father, Son, and Spirit have done the “heavy work” in our reclamation and salvation, but they have forced these unspeakably generous blessings on no one. They require our response to their offer of grace, forgiveness, mercy, and salvation at last. The wonderfully simple plan of response includes belief in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), renunciation of one’s sins and errors in repentance (Acts 17:30), confession of one’s faith in Jesus as God’s Son (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10), baptism in order to be saved (Mark 16:16), and a life of faithful service to the Christ in Whom we believe (1 Cor. 15:58). God has even made provisions for us when we sin as His children: The blood of Christ cleanses us as we confess and repent of those sins (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-9). While this plan may seem “too good to be true,” its implementation began on Pentecost and will continue until time is no more.

Conclusion

Our wonderful, loving God has done all He could to save us without interfering with our free wills to choose to obey and serve Him. His many plans and works on our behalf to affect our salvation, consummated in the coming and death of His Son, are what make the Gospel good news. The news is so good that most people refuse to believe it as if it were all fantasy. Failed promises have caused many to be wary of things that seem too good to be true, because such things often are. However, not so with the Gospel.

No greater news could be announced or promise given. The best part of it all is that it is absolutely warrantied by the Creator Himself (Heb. 6:17-19). We have the grand task of so disseminating this message that all men in each generation will have the opportunity to act upon it (Mat. 28:19-20). Let us go everywhere and to everybody with the message that is “too good to be true,” but is.

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