

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## The Gospel of Christ Jesus: Decision day is now

During my childhood in the 1950s, my father owned a newsagent shop and so I was familiar with newspaper headlines. Dad was usually sent an A-board sheet carrying the latest headlines with any newspaper delivery. He inserted it into a noticeboard outside his shop in the hope that the headlines would grab the attention of passers-by and cause them to buy the newspaper. It worked particularly well with the local Saturday evening "Football Pink" newspaper, which gave details and reports of the matches played that afternoon. After all, what could be more important to Geordies than to know how "The Toon" did that day?! The importance of news headlines is still recognised in today's news-thirsty world. It features in all media news reporting activity and is there in your face: on your TV, radio, computer, tablet or phone.

By now, you'll be wondering why I'm talking about news headlines when I should be speaking on my allocated title "Decision day is now" from 2 Corinthians 6:2! Well, it's to convey the force of the second sentence in that verse: "*Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (English Standard Version). Literally, this reads just like news-headlines: "*Look, now the acceptable time! Look, now the day of salvation!*" God wants everyone in the world to grasp the great opportunity available to them.

This Gospel-era is that special part of this world's history when His love has been demonstrated through His Son. Through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ shed upon the cross, God has provided a full salvation. By believing in Christ, I'm saved from the penalty of my sins. But I'm also presently being saved from the power and practice of sin through the power of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and, when the Lord comes to take me to heaven at the Rapture, I'll be saved from the very presence of sin. But, "Decision day is now" for me and you, that is, this precise moment in time. It's right now that each one of us must individually accept God's offer of salvation for ourselves.

Yes, today is the acceptable time with God and therefore for men it's "salvation's day!" Tomorrow may be too late! And one day, the day of God's grace will end.

I'll start today's Scripture-reading from the English Standard Version at 2 Corinthians 5:18, where this Good News, the Gospel of salvation, is called "*The Ministry of Reconciliation*".

*"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us [Christians] to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore ... on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake [God] made [Jesus Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2).

The word "reconciliation" means that God has a long-standing issue with mankind that needs to be sorted out by each one of us with Him. It goes back to when Adam sinned and Eve was deceived in the Garden of Eden. Adam knew full well what he was doing when he disobeyed God's instruction. He exerted his own will and fell into sin. Sin is doing what I want, or what I think is OK for me. "*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness*" (1 John 3:4, English Standard Version).

After the Fall, Adam fathered children "*in his own likeness, after his [own] image*" (Genesis 5:3). Each and everyone of them sinned as the repeated statement "*and he died*" in Genesis 5 prove (Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). In Romans 5:12-14, Paul gives this explanation concerning early mankind: "*Therefore, just as sin [entered] the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned - for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam*" (English Standard Version).

Moreover, in Romans 1:18-32, he provides a detailed account of how mankind again rebelled against God after the Flood: "*The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to*

*them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them"* (Romans 1:18-32, English Standard Version)

What is strikingly obvious is that these very same attitudes and sinful practices prevail today, despite almost 2,000 years of Gospel preaching! But remember the Lord Jesus said: *"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the [coming of the] Son of Man"* (Luke 17:26, English Standard Version). Please keep this prophecy in mind for later in this talk.

Before I move on, let me remind you of today's Good News headline: *"Look, now the acceptable time! Look, now the day of salvation!"* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

My next point focusses on the word *"trespasses"* in 2 Corinthians 5:19. When God in His mercy and grace chose Israel to represent Him to the wayward nations of the world, He gave them the Ten Commandments to follow (see Exodus 20:1-21). But Romans 10:3-4 states that rather than submitting to it, they set about establishing their own righteousness. Moreover, Romans 8:3 concludes that they couldn't keep the Law because of the weakness of their inherent sinful nature (see also Romans 7:5). And don't we all know this to be true? When we see the line that we shouldn't cross, we wilfully step over it. We trespass! (Romans 3:20) However, and praise God, the Gospel brings news of forgiveness of sins! Also, notice the way Israel dealt with their long-promised Messiah. Although *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself"* (2 Corinthians 5:19, King James Version), John 1 records two remarkable facts:

1. *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him"* (John 1:10).
2. *"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him"* (John 1:11, English Standard Version).

In the Lord's own parable about them, the Jews wilfully said: *"This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance"* (Matthew 21:38, English Standard Version). God had tested Israel by the Law and through the prophets for some 1,500 years but, when He finally sent His Son to them, *"they took him and threw him out ... and killed him"* (Matthew 21:39). And the Jews Jesus spoke to even realised that the parable about themselves!

The guilt of both Jew and Gentile is clearly proven. But the Good News is that God has provided the way of reconciliation for sinful mankind. He *"has consigned [both Jew and Gentile] to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. ... who ... [are] alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds"* (Romans 11:32 with Colossians 1:21, English Standard Version). It was *"while we were ... sinners ... [and] ... enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son"* (Romans 5:8, 10, English Standard Version).

This message we Christians preach is called *"the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation"* in Ephesians 1:13. So, let me remind you again of today's Good News headline: *"Look, now the acceptable time! Look, now the day of salvation!"* (2 Corinthians 6:2)

A person who attends some of the services at my local church is very critical of us because we "preach the same message week after week, month after month, year upon year." Our constant reply is "that's because the message never changes whilst God allows 'the day of salvation' to continue". Christians are simply messengers to whom God has committed *"the word of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:19, King James Version). In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:20 calls Christians *"ambassadors for Christ"* and 2 Corinthians 6:1 *"fellow-workers with Him."* Ambassadors in an alien world which continues to be hostile to both Him and to God. The hymn "The King's Business" expresses this great privilege and responsibility of ours:

*I am a stranger here, within a foreign land  
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;  
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea;  
I'm here on business for my King.*

*I come to tell of One who gave His precious life,  
That He might offer peace, and end the sinful strife.  
This message I repeat 'tis God who doth entreat,  
And that's my business for my King.*

*This is the King's command, that all men everywhere  
Repent and turn away from sin's seductive snare  
That all who will obey with Him shall reign for aye;  
And that's my business for my King.*

*This is the message that I bring  
A message angels fain would sing:  
"Oh be ye reconciled!"  
Thus saith my Lord and King,  
"Oh be ye reconciled to God!"*

Elijah T Cassel (1849-1930)

The responsibilities of an ambassador have recently been highlighted by the British Embassy in Moscow. Britain's relationship with Russia reached a critical low during 2018 over the toxic nerve agents, Novichok, poisoning incidents in Salisbury. First, there was the public accusation of Russia's involvement made in a formal statement in the House of Commons by the PM. This was quickly followed by exactly the same statement being read out by the British ambassador to the Russian media, on the steps of the British Embassy in Moscow. He said what he was instructed to say by his government although he was in a country openly hostile to that version of events. He did not dilute it or change it in any way at all. He truly represented his country even at risk to his own personal safety. Similarly, Christians are bound to the message of reconciliation given to them by their Lord and Master, even if it's not what the world likes, or wants, to hear. When they speak on behalf of their Master, they receive the same kind hostility as He did (see John 15:18-25).

God, in His great love for the world, has never been indifferent about mankind's fallen condition. From the very moment of the Fall in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:1-7), God has been working out His plan of salvation. Sin has taken everyone of us far away from God and made us His enemies. Therefore, we need to be reconciled to God! To remove the mighty gulf between Himself and lost men, He sent His son and made Him a sin offering at the Cross (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). It's by personal repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that you are saved and reconciled to God.

*There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin  
There's a door that is open and you may go in  
At Calvary's cross is where you begin  
When you come as a sinner to Jesus.*

EH Swinstead (1882-1950)

Upon believing a person is made the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21) and is justified by His grace (see Romans 3:24-26). So, I repeat again today's Good News headline: "*Look, now the acceptable time! Look, now the day of salvation!*" (2 Corinthians 6:2) and ask you to decide to accept Jesus as your Saviour.

I conclude today's talk with some comments on its title "Decision day is now!" This world of ours is governed by times and seasons. The very idea that today is "a favourable time" with God and that it's called "*the day of salvation*", indicates that it must, and will, end at some future date. (Remember the Lord's prophecy from earlier? The end is drawing near!)

The meaning of "*now is*", that is, "*today*", in our text is found in Hebrews 4:7b, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*" No one can afford to spurn, disregard, neglect or reject the Gospel invitation to "*be reconciled to God*" for "*it is appointed for men to die once but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27, New King James Version).

As far as I, or any other Christian believer is concerned, we therefore implore people on Christ's behalf (2 Corinthians 5:20). Being aware of the terror of God (2 Corinthians 5:11, JN Darby Translation) but compelled by

the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 14-15), we beseech, entreat, or plead with people to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). But God himself demands people to believe the message for the: *“gospel ... the preaching of Jesus Christ ... has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith”* (Romans 16:25-26, English Standard Version). And: *“The [former] times of [mankind’s wilful] ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by [the] man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30-31, English Standard Version). Therefore, today is “Decision day” for every listener of today’s Gospel message.

Gospel preachers rightly focus on Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:14-17: *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

John 3:14-15 are another way of saying *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”*; and John 3:16-17 explain what Paul calls *“the message of reconciliation”* in 2 Corinthians 5:19. But we must not forget that the Lord’s positive assurance, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned”* (John 3:18a), is followed by these stark statements *“whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil”* (John 3:18b-19).

Furthermore, John’s concluding comments in John 3:36 make clear the outcome involved in the decision each one of us makes: *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

And the Lord Jesus himself provides this insight to the day of salvation and the future beyond it in John 5:24-29: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. The [day of salvation] is now here, when the [spiritually] dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For ... the Father ... has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for a [future] hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of [eternal] judgment”* (English Standard Version).

I finish with a hymn which urges people to decide to accept Christ as their Saviour and Lord:

*“Come!” ’tis Jesus gently calling,  
 “Ye with care and toil oppressed,  
 With your guilt howe’er appalling -  
 Come, and I will give you rest.”  
 For your sin He “once has suffered,”  
 On the cross the work was done;  
 And the word by God now uttered  
 To each weary soul is “Come!”*

*“Come!” the Father’s house stands open,  
 With its love, and light, and song,  
 And, returning to the Father,  
 All to you may now belong.  
 From sin’s distant land of famine,  
 Toiling ’neath the mid-day sun.  
 To a Father’s house of plenty,  
 And a Father’s welcome “Come!”*

*“Come!” for night is gathering quickly  
 O’er this world’s fast-fleeting day:  
 If you linger till the darkness,  
 You will surely miss your way.  
 And still waiting - sadly waiting’  
 Till the day its course has run,  
 With His patience unabating,  
 Jesus lingers for you - “Come!”*

*“Come!” for angel hosts are musing  
O'er this sight so strangely sad:  
God “beseeching” man refusing  
To be made for ever glad!  
From the world and its delusion  
Now our voices rise as one;  
While we shout God’s invitation,  
Heaven itself re-echoes “Come!”*

AS Ormsby

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, T1071, entitled “Decision day is now” from our series, “The Gospel of Christ Jesus”. And remember its Good News, Gospel headline: *“Look, now the acceptable time! Look, now the day of salvation!”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

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