

### Prayer

Dear Father,

Your loving-kindness and tender-mercy overwhelm me. When covered in the unrighteousness of my guilt and shame before your holiness, you removed it all and instead clothed me with the robe of righteousness, then welcomed me into your arms and into your family, made clean, with hope and joy, confident of your ongoing care and goodness in my life.

Accept my thanks, and may I henceforth live a life worthy of your holy and wonderful name.

I pray in my Saviour's name, Amen.

### Song: *by Don Moen*

1. Christmas is about His glory, Christmas is about His grace,  
Christmas is a gift of love our Father gave us  
More than just another story about a special time and place,  
Christmas is a time to lift a song of praise

*For God is with us, and we celebrate the Glory of His presence.*

*Christ has come, to fill our hearts with love.*

*He came to save us, King of kings and Lord of lords, His name is Jesus,*

*God with us, Emmanuel has come.*

2. Angels filled the night with singing, God is reaching out to man  
Bringing us a gift of hope in Christ our Saviour  
More than just a time of giving, this is God's eternal plan  
And Christmas is the reason we can sing again

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### Scripture

- Luke 2:8-11

### Message We Need A Saviour

For those familiar with the Scriptures, it is apparent that one of several themes running from beginning to end is that, left to itself, the human condition is in a perilous situation, that the human psyche is in a bad place. And it ought to be clear to anyone familiar with current affairs or even a basic knowledge of history that this Scriptural theme is everywhere to be seen. Whether in international conflict, strained or broken relationships, domestic violence, mental health, personal carelessness, selfishness, greed and hopelessness, the sad circumstances of life have been a constant throughout human history.

There is another connected theme that also threads its way through Scripture, and that is that both individually and collectively we humans need to be saved

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from this condition, that is we need a saviour. The words save, saviour, salvation appears hundreds of times in Scripture, explicitly in all but nine books of the Bible, implicitly in all of them.

Actually, the need for a saviour is not just a Scriptural theme. You have probably heard some who maintain that while things are certainly grim, if we continue to develop our knowledge and technology we will eventually turn things around and overcome all these challenges. The atheist, if they think there is any hope at all, must of necessity place their hope on human effort – evolution seems to have done us a disservice in this respect. In other words, we have the capacity to be our own saviour. Some argue it's already happening. Richard Dawkins and others postulate that over millennia, and independent of religion “we humans have been getting nicer, gentler, less violent, less cruel”.<sup>1</sup> You can make up your own mind about that, but if there has been an improvement it's going to take several more millennia to make it obvious!

Scripture does look fairly and squarely at the condition of our temporal life, but it also looks to that far greater issue, one that is of primary importance and indeed the key issue behind our human condition, which is the broken relationship between humanity and the living God, and the consequent corruption and brokenness of the human ego, or heart. This is something that cannot be changed through human effort, whether through education, psychology, medicine, laws and their enforcement, prosperity and more, even religion. No amount of study, research and development can fix it. The king's men cannot put Humpty together again. Nor can his horses! But we do need a saviour. Yes, there's been some partial and temporary success here and there – some good and strong leaders who brought social stability, economic prosperity and justice to the people, but it's always been localised and temporary. And seldom has much to do with God. No one seems to tick all the boxes.

Except one. You know who that is, of course: Jesus Christ of Nazareth whose birth we have just celebrated. Joseph was told it.<sup>2</sup> The angels announced it.<sup>3</sup> The men of Samaria declared it: “this is indeed the Saviour of the world”<sup>4</sup> – a bold claim! Repeated by John.<sup>5</sup>

It was interesting to read in the media<sup>6</sup> last weekend that there is a move amongst some of our present day high profile thinkers and commentators toward a favourable perception of Jesus Christ, especially his life and teaching, particularly as recorded in the Gospels. But there is quite a gap between saying that Jesus' words are extraordinary (which they are) and worthy of serious consideration, and the next step of acknowledging that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, and therefore my Saviour. Some have taken that step.

When we look at the several reasons Jesus gave for his coming, salvation is a common theme. Here's a quick summary (thanks CHATGP, a useful tool!):

- “I have come to bear witness to the truth.” (Jn 18:37)

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins “Outgrowing God”, p130

<sup>2</sup> Matt 1:21 “[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:11 “Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”

<sup>4</sup> John 4:42 “we testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:14

<sup>6</sup> The Weekend Australian “Niall Ferguson's journey from atheist to Christian” by Greg Sheridan 21-22/12/24

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- “I have come to fulfill the law.” (Matt 5:17)
- “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Lk 19:10)
- “The Son of Man come to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:45)
- “I was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.” (Lk 4:43)
- “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (Jn 12:46)
- “For I have come to do the will of him who sent me.” (Jn 6:38)
- “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (Jn 10:10)
- “I have come to bring division.” (Matt 10:34)
- “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 Jn 3:8)
- “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn 14:9)

These statements are not rules to live by, although Jesus did have a lot to say about that. Neither are they just a set of philosophical thought prompts, although they do provoke thinking. They are declarations of offensive intent based on our collective need of a Saviour. To acknowledge that requires no less than the work of the Holy Spirit, not just to agree that we need saving, but to understand what we need saving from, and then to acknowledge who is able to do it. Jesus is the Saviour of the world, and therefore by extension, the Saviour of the individual. His coming made that possible.

We can look at the current circumstances surrounding us, as we noted earlier, and say “Who will save us?” But who will take the next step and ask: “Who will save me?” It took an earthquake and the threat of death to get one man to ask that question. He put that question to a couple of Christians he was with at the time. They immediately replied “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Our world and the individuals in it have all been infected by our collective and individual rebellion against the living God, otherwise called sin. We suffer the consequences in manifold ways, both now and potentially for eternity. It’s easy to think always was, always will be; the possibility of salvation seems remote because of the enormity of it all. But there is One who has stepped in and cut a swathe through the otherwise impenetrable envelope of ugliness and fear, leading to life and light and hope and satisfaction. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who came as a baby, lived, died, defeated death, and lives forever more. We need a Saviour! Jesus is that Saviour! And he saves you.

Amen

### Prayer for suffering Christians – Sri Lanka: *from Barnabas Prayer for 28/12/24*

Sri Lanka’s presidential election on 21 September was won by Anura Kumara Dissanayake. The new president hopes to revive Sri Lanka’s struggling economy. The country suffered an economic crash in 2022, while poverty rates have more than doubled since 2020.

Christians, who constitute around 8% of the Sri Lankan population, are often among the poorest and most disadvantaged. Church leaders have also expressed dissatisfaction with the slow investigation into suicide bomb attacks at Easter 2019 in which at least 254 people died, mainly Christians.

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Pray that the Lord will equip President Dissanayake and his government to rule wisely, and that he will develop policies that will benefit all Sri Lankans.

**Song:** *by J Ingram, J Smith, K Stanfill, S Curran*

1. I was buried beneath my shame, who could carry that kind of weight  
It was my tomb, till I met You.
2. I was breathing, but not alive, all my failures I tried to hide  
It was my tomb, till I met You.

*You called my name, and I ran out of that grave  
Out of the darkness into Your glorious day (repeat)*

3. Now Your mercy has saved my soul, now Your freedom is all that I know  
The old made new, Jesus, when I met You

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### Benediction:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA*