

## “Lenten Series: Trick or Truth: Fools or Followers”

2018: The Year of the Winner

### Scripture:

### Matthew 28: 1-20 (NIV)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” <sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

<sup>11</sup> While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ <sup>14</sup> If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” <sup>15</sup> So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

**Subject Question:** In Matthew's account of Christ's resurrection on that first Easter morning, what three mind- boggling assertions does he unashamedly present to His readers to not only ponder, but to make definite decisions about?

**Compliment answer:** The Greatest of Claims (Vs.1-10), The Greatest of Challenges (Vs.11-15) and the Greatest of Choices (Vs.16-20).

**Big Idea:** In Matthew's account of Christ's resurrection on that first Easter morning, the three mind- boggling assertions that he unashamedly presents to His readers to not only ponder, but to make definite decisions about are: The Greatest of Claims (Vs.1-10), The Greatest of Challenges (Vs.11-15) and the Greatest of Choices (Vs.16-20).

**Homiletical Idea:**                   **"The Alive Dead for the Dead Alive"**

**Purpose:** I want the congregation to consider Matthew's claims as to the events surrounding that first Easter morning but more, to hear and make a decision about the why Christ actually had to not only die on the cross but be raised to life again on that third day.

**Ground Work:**

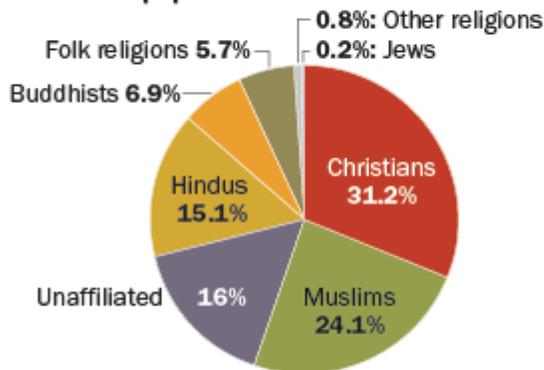
**Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe**

**BY CONRAD HACKETT AND DAVID MCCLENDON**

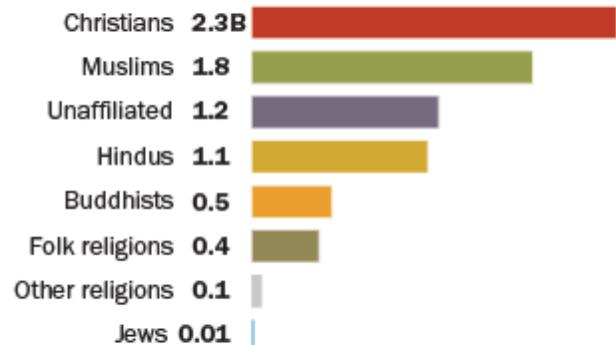
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## Christians are the largest religious group in 2015

% of world population



Number of people in 2015, in billions



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
"The Changing Global Religious Landscape"

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Christians remained the largest religious group in the world in 2015, making up nearly a third (31%) of Earth's 7.3 billion people, according to a [new Pew Research Center demographic analysis](#). But the report also shows that the number of Christians in what many consider the religion's heartland, the continent of Europe, is in decline.

Christians had the most births and deaths of any religious group in recent years, according to our demographic models. Between 2010 and 2015, an estimated 223 million babies were born to Christian mothers and roughly 107 million Christians died – a natural increase of 116 million.

## Christians in Europe dying faster than they are being born

*Among Europe's aging Christian population, estimated deaths outnumbered births between 2010 and 2015. Among all other groups, births outnumbered deaths.*

**Estimated natural increase (births minus deaths) 2010-2015, in millions**

	Europe	Middle East- N. Africa	North America	Asia- Pacific	Latin America	Sub-Saharan Africa
Christians	-5.6M	+0.9M	+5.8M	+17.7M	+32.6M	+64.5M
Muslims	+2.3	+32.1	+0.3	+79.5	*	+38.2
Unaffiliated	+1.4	+0.2	+2.4	+16.8	+3.1	+2.2
Hindus	*	+0.1	+0.2	+66.5	*	*
Buddhists	*	*	+0.2	+11.7	*	*
Folk	*	+0.1	*	+9.6	+0.3	+3.3
Other	*	*	+0.1	+1.0	*	+0.2
Jews	*	+0.4	*	*	*	*

\*Indicates absolute value of natural increase during period was less than 100,000 people

Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections.

See Methodology for details.

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But among Christians in Europe the reverse is true: Deaths outnumbered births by nearly 6 million during this brief period. In Germany alone, there were an estimated 1.4 million more Christian deaths than births from 2010 to 2015. This natural decrease in Europe's aging Christian population was unique compared with Christians in other parts of the world and other religious groups. In fact, Muslims and the unaffiliated in Europe both experienced natural increases in their populations, with our new report estimating that there were over 2 million and 1 million more births than deaths, respectively, between 2010 and 2015.

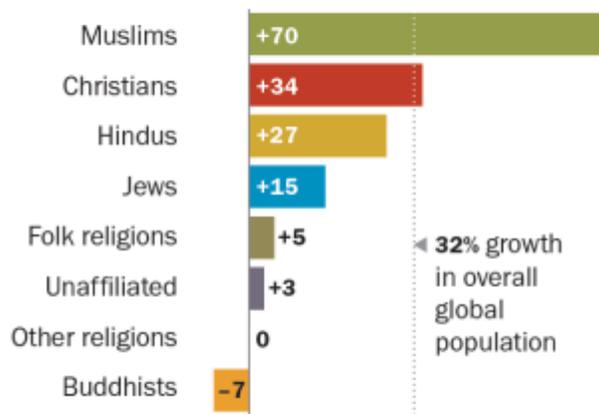
Globally, Muslims make up the second largest religious group, with 1.8 billion people, or 24% of the world's population, followed by religious "nones" (16%),

Hindus (15%) and Buddhists (7%). Adherents of folk religions, Jews and members of other religions make up smaller shares of the world's people.

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### Muslims projected to be fastest-growing major religious group

*Estimated percent change in population size, 2015-2060*



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
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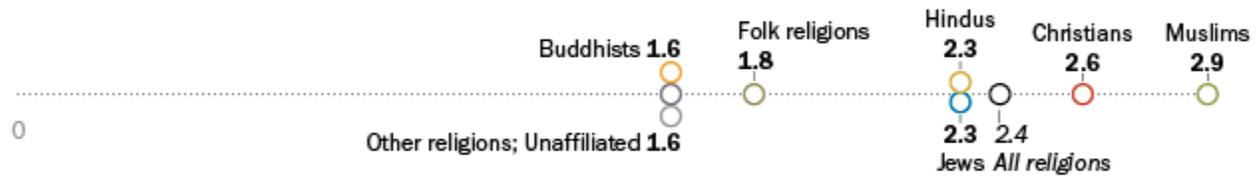
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Muslims experienced the greatest *natural increase* among all religious groups, including Christians. Births to Muslims between 2010 and 2015 outnumbered deaths by 152 million (213 million births vs. 61 million deaths). Globally, all major groups had more births than deaths.

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## Muslims, Christians have more children per woman than any other religious group

Total fertility rate, by religion, 2015-2020



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
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Not all babies will remain in the religion of their mother, of course. In some countries, including the United States, it is fairly common for adults to leave their childhood religion and switch to another faith (or no faith). Globally, however, the effect of religious switching is overshadowed by the impact of differences in fertility and mortality.

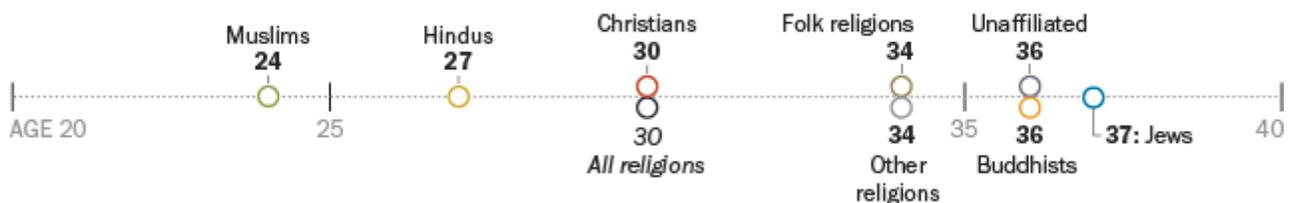
Indeed, fertility differences between religious groups are one of the key factors behind current population trends and will be important for future growth. Globally, Muslims have the highest fertility rate of any religious group – an average of 2.9 children per woman, well above replacement level (2.1), the minimum typically needed to maintain a stable population. This fertility advantage is one reason why Muslims are expected to catch up with Christians in absolute number and as a [share of the global population in the coming decades](#). Christians have the second highest fertility rate, at 2.6 children per woman. Hindu and Jewish fertility (2.3 each) are both just below the global average of 2.4 children per woman. All other major religious groups have fertility levels too low to sustain their populations.

Age differences are also important for future growth. Some religious groups' adherents are predominantly young, with their prime childbearing years still ahead of them, while members of other groups are older and largely past their

childbearing years. Muslims have the youngest median age (24) of all religious groups, which is also expected to contribute to their rapid growth. Hindus (27) are also younger than the median age of the world's overall population (30), while the median age of Christians (30) matches the global median. All the other groups are older than the global median, which is part of the reason they are expected to fall behind the pace of global population growth.

## Muslims and Hindus are the youngest religious populations

*Median age by religion, 2015*



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
 "The Changing Global Religious Landscape"

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### Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

28:1-8 Christ rose the third day after his death; that was the time he had often spoken of. On the first day of the first week God commanded the light to shine out of darkness. On this day did He who is the Light of the world, shine out of the darkness of the grave; and this day is from henceforward often mentioned in the New Testament, as the day which Christians religiously observed in solemn assemblies, to the honor of Christ. Our Lord Jesus could have rolled back the stone by his own power, but he chose to have it done by an angel. The resurrection of Christ, as it is the joy of his friends, so it is the terror and confusion of his enemies. The angel encouraged the women against their fears. Let the sinners in Zion be afraid. Fear not ye, for his resurrection will be your consolation. Our communion with him must be spiritual, by faith in his word. When we are ready to make this world our home, and to say, It is good to be here, then let us remember our Lord Jesus is not here, he is risen; therefore let our hearts rise, and seek the things that are above. He is risen, as he said. Let us

never think that strange which the word of Christ has told us to expect; whether the sufferings of this present time, or the glory that is to be revealed. It may have a good effect upon us, by faith to view the place where the Lord lay. Go quickly. It was good to be there, but the servants of God have other work appointed. Public usefulness must be chosen before the pleasure of secret communion with God. Tell the disciples, that they may be comforted under their present sorrows. Christ knows where his disciples dwell, and will visit them. Even to those at a distance from the plenty of the means of grace, he will graciously manifest himself. The fear and the joy together quickened their pace. The Disciples of Christ should be forward to make known to each other their experiences of communion with their Lord; and should tell others what God has done for their souls.

#### **Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary**

28:11-15 What wickedness is it which men will not be brought to by the love of money! Here was large money given to the soldiers for advancing that which they knew to be a lie, yet many grudge a little money for advancing what they know to be the truth. Let us never starve a good cause, when we see bad ones so liberally supported. The priests undertook to secure them from the sword of Pilate, but could not secure these soldiers from the sword of God's justice, which hangs over the heads of those that love and make a lie. Those men promise more than they can perform, who undertake to save a man harmless in doing a willful sin. But this falsehood disproved itself. Had the soldiers been all asleep, they could not have known what passed. If any had been awake, they would have roused the others and prevented the removal; and certainly if they had been asleep, they never would have dared to confess it; while the Jewish rulers would have been the first to call for their punishment. Again, had there been any truth in the report, the rulers would have prosecuted the apostles with severity for it. The whole shows that the story was entirely false. And we must not charge such things to the weakness of the understanding, but to the wickedness of the heart. God left them to expose their own course. The great argument to prove Christ to be the Son of God, is his resurrection; and none could have more convincing proofs of the truth of that than these soldiers; yet they took bribes to hinder others from believing. The plainest evidence will not affect men, without the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Pulpit Commentary**

Verses 16-20. - **Our Lord appears to the disciples in Galilee, and gives them a commission to teach and baptize.** (Peculiar to St. Matthew; but comp. [Mark](#)

[16:15-18](#).) Verse 16. - **Then the eleven disciples**. There is no note of time in the original, which gives merely, **But the eleven**, etc. The meeting here narrated took place on some day after the first Easter week. The number "eleven" shows the loss of one of the Sacred College, whose complement was not filled up till just before Pentecost ([Acts 1:15-26](#)). **Went away into Galilee**. St. Matthew takes pains to show the exact fulfilment of Christ's very special injunction and promise concerning Galilee (see vers. 7, 10, and notes there, and [Matthew 26:32](#)). The evangelist's object being to set forth Christ in his character as King and Lawgiver, he puts aside all other incidents in order to give prominence to this appearance, where Jesus announces his supreme authority (ver. 18), gives the commission to his apostles, and promises his perpetual presence (vers. 19, 20). **Into a mountain** (τὸ ὄρος, **the mountain**), **where**(οὔ instead of οἷ) **Jesus had appointed them**. We do not know the locality intended, though it must have been some spot familiar to the disciples, and was probably plainly designated at the time when Christ appointed the meeting. Some have fixed on Tabor as the scene of this revelation, others on the Mount of Beatitudes; but where nothing is stated it is best to lay aside conjecture and accept the designed indefiniteness. Many commentators have determined that this appearance on the Galilean mountain was that mentioned by St. Paul ([1 Corinthians 15:6](#)), as manifested to five hundred brethren at once. This is a mere conjecture, probable, but not certain. If it was the case, we must consider that St. Matthew singles out the eleven apostles as the most eminent among the company, and those to whom the Lord specially addressed the commission which he mentions. Of the five hundred brethren, St. Paul, writing some twenty years or more after this time, testifies that the greater number were still alive, only some having "fallen asleep." There never was, indeed, any historical fact the authenticity of which was more remarkably and irrefragably certified than the resurrection of Christ.

**Introduction:** The world is a very religious place. “, according to a [new Pew Research Center demographic analysis](#) Christians remained the largest religious group in the world in 2015, making up nearly a third (31%) of Earth’s 7.3 billion people . Muslims make up the second largest religious group, with 1.8 billion people, or 24% of the world’s population, followed by religious “nones” (16%), Hindus (15%) and Buddhists (7%). Adherents of folk religions, Jews and members of other religions make up smaller shares of the world’s people. Yes, the world is a very religious place. Many folks including many Christians have

come to conclude that with so many options, so many philosophies, so many concepts about a Deity, that it's impossible for just one religion to be right and every other to be wrong. Thus, the thinking then goes---as long as a person is religious then that is all that really matters. After all, why offend people. Can't we all just get along? To add to that thought, Even within Christianity, there are many opposing views. You have the Calvinists, the Presbyterians, the reformed, the Lutherans, who believe in the total sovereignty of God and thus, God determines who will be His. On the other side of that coin are the Armenians, such as the Baptists, Methodists, and to a large extent the Catholics, who hold to the 'absolute' free will of humanity that dictates and overrides Gods Sovereignty--People themselves, not God--who determine who will belong to God. Theologically, you have the Universalist Christians, that believe that everyone will eventually be saved and go to heaven because Jesus came to die for everyone. You have others who have bought into Syncretism who believe that every religion has an element of truth and thus one can pull in a little bit of Hinduism, a little Buddhism, a little reading from the Torah, a little insight from (Pali Canon), Mahayana Sutras and of course there is even a place for the bible and Jesus, if that's your thing. For the more enlightened "Christian," even the a little bit of belief in the possibility of reincarnation seems logical to many---another life and another chance. O yes, the world is a very religious place. You have those on the fringes of Christianity such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe God is the Creator and Supreme Being. But reject the Trinity doctrine, which they consider unscriptural.<sup>[77]</sup> They view God as the Father, an invisible spirit "person" separate from the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is described as God's "active force", rather than the third part of the Trinity. Then there are the Mormons who also can't get their theology around the trinity---consider it to be more of a social union rather than an ontological state of being and believe that through the grace of Jesus, Mormons may become perfectly sanctified in this lifetime and thereby literally become gods or achieve a state known as exaltation. Who is right? One of the reasons why I love Matthews's account of the resurrection story is that He just puts the facts out there and says, you decide. There's a lot of choices---But the One that I am sharing, I have found to be the Way... the Way that goes beyond philosophy, the way beyond a life creed, for My tale tells a tell that operates for the premise that the Proof is in the pudding. It won't just change your mind, it will, can and has and does change your entire life: heart, mind and soul and has the power to convince the seeker the unique ability to know that they have

found the answer to their soul desire to know that there is not only a God, but a God that is findable—more is loving, a God that has reached out to us when all out reaching out to him has fallen short—From our text today we see that in his telling of the tale he describes that first Easter by breaking it down into three distinct sections: The Greatest of Claims (Vs.1-10), The Greatest of Challenges (Vs.11-15) and the Greatest of Choices (Vs.16-20).

(The Proof is in the Pudding)

- A. The Greatest of Claims (Vs.1-10). *After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.<sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.<sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.<sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”<sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*
- B. This first section just makes one of the greatest and challenging of all claims—a Man died, and now was risen. A good man—a righteous , innocent man, who for some reason seemingly was on a life mission... A man who did not deserve to taste such cruelty and be so despised and hated—for Love. He died... He now is alive... Alive? If you think that you are the first and only one to ever have trouble just accepting this statement by blind faith, you couldn't be more wrong. Yet, here it is—A Man they saw crucified, a tomb they saw fortified, and a hope they saw paralyzed.
- C. Now angelic being on the scene, giving instructions to follow... a tale that who in the world would believe...? And yet, this is where Matthew begins in His telling of this tale of Reconciliation and Promise.

D. Matthew simply puts it out there—believe it or not... here are the facts as I saw them. The Proof is in the Pudding... This is the claim—and it's the greatest of all claims that have been. And almost in reaction to the flood of human doubt he knew would be on the mind of those who would read His account—he lays out an “out” if you will—a logical explanation. What will you believe is the implied but the acknowledged Greatest of challenges.

(The Proof is in the Pudding)

- A. The Greatest of Challenges (Vs.11-15). *“While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.<sup>12</sup> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money,<sup>13</sup> telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’<sup>14</sup> If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”<sup>15</sup> So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*
- B. The reason why this is the greatest of all challenges is because this is so very logical, this is what we want to believe—it would seem that only the foolish wouldn't see what really happened... it much easier to accept this version than a version that has a risen person.
- C. And I believe that Matthew know exactly what he was doing when he included this challenge in the telling of the story. Because, let's face it, there always have been those and always will be those who simply will not or cannot accept a supernatural explanation for the appearance of Jesus that morning. History is full of different explanations... and yet
- D. Matthew knew that the biggest challenge that you and I face as Christians is to hold onto the fact that we not only serve a living Savior, but we serve an absent Savior. But Matthew just throws it out there. Here it is-- believe it or not... here are the facts. Here is the story. But, don't forget, the proof is in the pudding... and thus, He leads us to the greatest of choices:

(The Proof is in the Pudding)

- A. The Greatest of Choices (Vs.16-20). *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.<sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them*

*and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

- B. The greatest of choices comes as we understand the call to accept the greatest of claims—a Man died... a man who claimed to be God. The greatest of challenges—to defy and deny our own rational thinking and our so human propensities to doubt. Now... to make a life changing choice to live in such a way to be about the business of trying to convince others...
- C. Thanks Matthew. He would probably say... Here it is-- believe it or not... here are the facts. Here is the story. But did I mention the proof in the pudding.
- D. And if you are like me you might be wondering, why... why was Matthew so matter of fact... why did he believe that anyone would even believe his telling of the story to begin with? The answer really doesn't lie in the resurrection and in the aftermath of Christ's resurrection as much as it does in the crucifixion. Matthew had a secret. He understood from the very beginning that the answer to all of life's questions about religion and which one can be believed and the liberal leaning pseudo-theologians that occupy the pews in each generation is the fact Christianity comes with a guarantee---a proof in the pudding experience. And let's face it an experience will beat out and argument every day of the week. How can we know that we know that Jesus Christ is truly alive, that He is not just one way, or a way, but the only way to God? Can there really be something that will so turn your heart and mind to truly with confidence say... others may be out in speculation land, but I have found the truth. Let me assure you. It's not the fact that there was a man named Jesus or that even now He is planning his eminent return. It's not if Jesus came as to why He came. And Matthew knew and I know that once you know that—all the claims, challenges and choices will simply be accepted as things that others may struggle with... but not me.

(The Proof is in the Pudding)

## Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?

### 1. God loves you and created you to know Him personally.

#### God's Love

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

#### God's Plan

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). What prevents us from knowing God personally?

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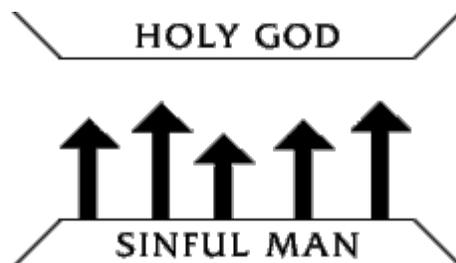
### 2. Man is sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.

#### Man is Sinful

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Man was created to have fellowship with God; but, because of his own stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

#### Man is Separated

"The wages of sin is death" [spiritual separation from God] (Romans 6:23).  
"...(Those) who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus...will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord..." (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9)



This diagram illustrates that God is holy and man is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and establish the personal relationship with Him through his own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion - but he inevitably fails. The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gulf...

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### **3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love.**

He Died in Our Place

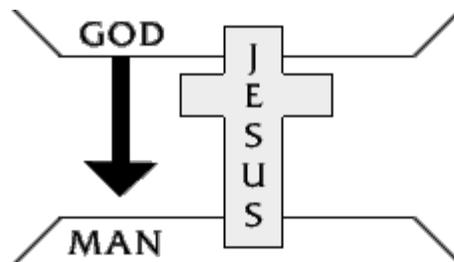
"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

He Rose From the Dead

"Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

He is the Only Way to God

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'" (John 14:6).



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

It is not enough just to know these truths...

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#### **4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love.**

We Must Receive Christ

"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12)

We Receive Christ Through Faith

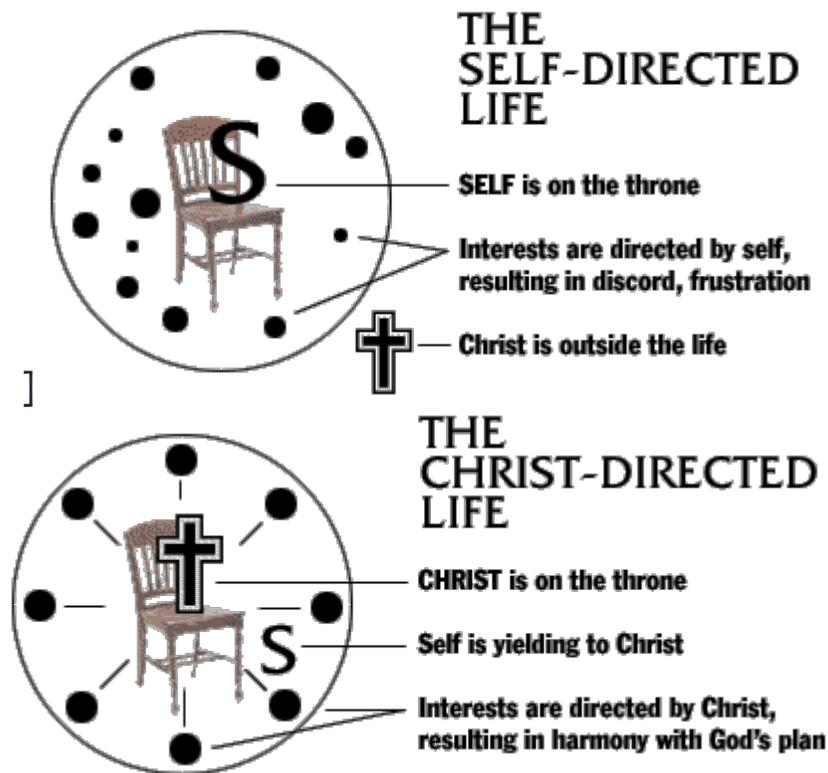
"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth (Read John 3:1-8.)

We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[Christ speaking] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20).

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives:



Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

The following explains how you can receive Christ:  
You Can Receive Christ Right Now by Faith Through Prayer

(Prayer is talking with God)

God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

*"Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."*

Did you pray this prayer?

## How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life

Did you receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said that He would come into your life and be your friend so you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

### The Bible Promises Eternal Life to All Who Receive Christ

"The witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him in. He will not deceive you.

An important reminder...  
Do Not Depend on Feelings

The promise of God's Word, the Bible - not our feelings - is our authority. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.

This train diagram illustrates the relationship among fact (God and His Word), faith (our trust in God and His Word), and feeling (the result of our faith and obedience) (John 14:21).



The train will run with or without the caboose. However, it would be useless to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, we as Christians do

not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

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### **Now That You Have Entered Into a Personal Relationship With Christ**

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of your will, many things happened, including the following:

1. Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20 and Colossians 1:27).
2. Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
3. You became a child of God (John 1:12).
4. You received eternal life (John 5:24).
5. You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you?

By thanking God, you demonstrate your faith.

To enjoy your new relationship with God...

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### **Suggestions For Christian Growth**

Spiritual growth results from trusting Jesus Christ. "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). A life of faith will enable you to trust God increasingly with every detail of your life, and to practice the following:

G Go to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).

R Read God's Word daily (Acts 17:11) - begin with the Gospel of John.

O Obey God moment by moment (John 14:21).

W Witness for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).

T Trust God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).

H Holy Spirit - Allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Galatians 5:16,17; Acts 1:8).

### The Importance of Baptism

The view of most evangelical Christian scholars is that salvation is by grace through faith alone. This is especially indicated by Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:16, 1 John 5:1. It is important to understand that baptism is a result of salvation, not a cause.

There are different baptism methods. They may include the sprinkling of water over the head of the professing believer or the total immersion of the person under water (Greek: "Baptismo" = to immerse). However, the procedure is not as important as the individual's understanding and motivation to seek baptism.

Some cite Mark 16:16 as their proof text that baptism is necessary for salvation, but they only quote the first half of the verse and typically leave out the second half, which indicates the necessity of belief as being the prerequisite to the salvation issue.

The way to resolve most problems pertaining to the issue of baptism is to look at the whole of Scripture. When we do, we find that there is absolutely nothing we can do as humans to earn salvation. Romans 6:23 tells us that salvation is a "free gift." Free means that there is nothing we can do to deserve it. On the other hand, baptism is something we choose to do. If baptism or any other human work or activity (such as going to church regularly, going on a pilgrimage or visiting a "holy site") contributed to our salvation, we could boast that we did something and contributed to our salvation. However, Scripture says that no one should boast before God Ephesians 2:8-9 .

We come to Christ through grace by faith, and our public baptism brings glory and honor to God. Baptism is an act of obedience, not to obtain salvation, but because of it -- because we love Him and want to obey Him. The motivation to pursue baptism should originate from a desire to show to the world an outward demonstration of the person's decision as well as the inward work the Holy Spirit has already begun in us. An unsaved person would not likely want to be baptized, because he would not have the Holy Spirit indwelling him to prompt his desire to follow Christ in obedience (unless a sect or cult group has erroneously taught him or her otherwise.) The fact that one even wants to be

baptized (being assured that only faith alone in Jesus Christ saves) is evidence that the Holy Spirit already indwells that person, a result of being born of the Spirit by faith alone.

In the book of Acts, baptism is typically the outward response to coming to faith. It was seen as part of a process which includes: 1) hearing (or reading about) the gospel, 2) being convicted and led by the Holy Spirit to confess one's sins (Greek: "Homologeō" = to agree with, to speak the same), 3) coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, 4) beginning the progress of growth (which includes repenting from known sin), 5) joining a group of believers or church fellowship, and 6) being baptized. The last two parts are where there are different opinions among believers or churches.

Where some churches differ with what has been stated above chiefly centers on whether a person is saved if they have not been baptized (or if they have not been baptized the "right" way). In our understanding a person is saved when they put their faith in Christ. Of course, we all want them to join a church which exalts Christ and be baptized.

### **Fellowship In a Good Church**

God's Word admonishes us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together..." (Hebrews 10:25). Several logs burn brightly together; but put one aside on the cold hearth and the fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians. If you do not belong to a church, do not wait to be invited. Take the initiative; call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ is honored and His Word is preached. Start this week, and make plans to attend regularly.