

Part Four

Why I Believe in Jesus Christ

Just the other day I discovered my youngest daughter with a mess on her hands. Painting her fingernails in the living room (as little four-year-olds are wont to do), she spilled the polish on the carpet. Horrified and knowing she was in trouble, she tried to solve her problem herself and wipe up the green polish. She only succeeded in smearing the polish over a larger area. Her solutions were only making it worse.

I slipped into the room and leaned over her as she furiously scrubbed. Surprised and embarrassed, she offered an explanation that was sort of an apology and sort of a lie. I smiled and said, “The truth is that you spilled it, isn’t it?” She stopped talking and returned to wiping up the mess, spreading the stain still more. She was in over her head.

Leaning down a bit nearer I whispered in her ear, “Why don’t you let me do that for you? I think I can get it clean.” Embarrassed and relieved, she stopped her efforts and handed me the cloth.

Sooner or later all of us realize that when it comes to this business of life, we are in over our heads. This is the heart of Christianity. In the midst of imperfect and sometimes broken lives, God’s message to us is, “Why don’t you let Me do that for you? I can get it clean.” Those of us who believe in Jesus Christ have simply embraced God’s offer to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Now there are many opinions with regard to Jesus Christ. Recently we sent a video team out on the street to ask the question, “Who is Jesus

Christ?” The answers couldn’t have been more diverse. Several said that He was a great man and teacher. Others said He was God’s Son and the Savior of mankind. One man said he was a heroine addict. Another said Jesus Christ was “one groovy cat.” (Actually, I agree with the last comment. Suffice it to say that if you mention the name of Jesus you’ll almost always get a reaction.

Why do I believe in Jesus Christ? It’s probably only fair that I define at the outset who I believe Jesus to be. Certainly I believe He was a real man. But I believe more than that. I also believe He was a prophet sent from God and a remarkable teacher. Yet my beliefs in Jesus reach still higher. I believe He was a miracle worker. And I believe He was a good man—the best who ever lived. But I believe more than this. I believe He was sinless. Beyond sinless, I believe He was God’s Son. And I believe He was God the Son. I believe He died an atoning death. I believe He was raised from the dead. I believe He ascended to heaven. I believe He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Now that’s a mouthful. Just as I suppose you’re not surprised by any of those statements, I am also aware that beliefs of that magnitude require some pretty strong justification. That’s my task. And while it would take several books (at least) to give you all my reasons for this rather colossal set of beliefs, I do want to give you at least some of my reasons for believing in Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist

The starting point of my beliefs is the eyewitness account. John the Baptist was one of those who knew Jesus Christ. Personally. As His cousin he knew Him as a child and as a prophet he was Jesus’ forerunner in ministry. While I’m interested in the opinions of the man on the street regarding Jesus, it’s the eyewitness account that is definitive for me. What did those who really knew Him believe? To find our answer, we need to look no further than John 1:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This is the one I meant when I said, “A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.”

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Perhaps you know enough Bible to know that John the Baptist was never a politically correct kind of a guy. He was unafraid to speak the truth regardless of

personal cost. Not surprisingly, embedded on honest John's lips is mankind's dark secret. Sin. In the same breath wherein John introduces Jesus to us, he also affirms an age-old reality—*"the sin of the world."* No wonder they eventually cut off his head.

Perhaps you know that sin is still a topic of real debate. There are a wide variety of opinions out there regarding what mankind really needs. Some think that man has no real problem. Others think that we're on the way up; we're still climbing the evolutionary ladder. Give us a few million more years and we'll get it right. Some think—if man has a problem—it's ignorance. Man just doesn't yet know what would be really good for him and society. Another take on mankind's deficit is that our problem is that we suppress ourselves too much. We're not in touch with our own individuality and our personal needs. Still further, there are those who think that the only real problem is negative thinking. Everything would be okay if we could just have a positive outlook.

I must admit that these diagnoses sound attractive. I'd like to think that the world's problems could be solved by simply getting everyone in touch with their individuality a bit more. But the Bible describes the human predicament in slightly starker terms. John presumes it in his statement about Jesus . . . *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

John's cryptic statement has become my own. Despite the fact that I had grown up on evolution and positive attitudes, I finally had to admit that the real problem was sin. I was bummed out. I had hoped for a more sophisticated diagnosis. Yet as I examined my life and the daily news, it became clear to me that a Book that was several thousand years old—the Bible—had a firmer handle on reality than Carl Sagan, Charles Darwin, or Madeline Murray O'Hare. The real problem was the old-fashioned one: sin. Sorry about that.

When it comes to thinking about Jesus and who He really might be, coming to terms with sin is "Step 1." A savior makes no sense unless we think that sin exists. And God sending His Son to deal with sin makes no sense unless we believe that sin is an enormous problem—a "God-sized" problem. Scripture describes sin as nothing less than a crisis. The Biblical teaching on sin is complex and varied (there are over twenty words which can be translated "sin" or a rough equivalent in the Old and New

Testaments). In other words, sin is like a dark gem with many different facets.

Why do I believe in Jesus Christ? I do so because I believe in sin. I'm wondering if I can convince you of the same reality. If you'll bear with me I'd like to take you on a brief "tour" of sin as the Bible describes it. I think you'll find that this old-fashioned Book is still up to date in its appraisal of mankind. I want you to grasp at least half of John's statement . . . *"the sin of the world."* Perhaps then I can nudge you closer to the first half of John's statement, *"Behold the Lamb of God."*

Sin is ignorance . . . Jonah 4:11

The beginning point of sin is that it is ignorance—specifically ignorance of God and His ways. Perhaps no single verse sums up man's innate ignorance of God more than God's statement about Nineveh to Jonah the wayward prophet. Nineveh knew nothing about God. As a result they lived so as to displease God. Listen to the graphic language of the Lord of Hosts:

*And should I not spare that great city of Nineveh . . .
Wherein are more than 120,000 people that cannot discern
between their right hand and their left hand. (Jonah 4:11)*

God's heart goes out to a people who simply were ignorant. When it came to things of God, they didn't even know their left hand from their right. And God sent Jonah to warn them and to teach them.

In today's world, the common notion is that we can figure God out on our own. Can we? I've come to the place in life wherein I don't trust my own ideas very much. They've gotten me in trouble more often than not. I'm more than willing to be taught because I can identify with the Ninevites. Their deficit is mankind's deficit—and my deficit as well. We are ignorant of God. Does anybody really think that left on their own they can reason their way to the thoughts of God?

It seems to me that there are two alternatives regarding truth. Either we rely on what we think is true and, if so, then we are the determiners of truth. (I don't like even the sound of those words.) Or we rely on revelation (truth given to us from God Himself). I am much more comfortable if I let God Himself define what is true and what isn't. I distrust myself. Perhaps I can put it this way: if anything is obvious it is that God is beyond us. Still further, even a casual reading of the newspaper makes it clear that mankind is forever losing touch with the most basic truths of God. Left to ourselves it seems that man tends towards a lie rather than that which is true. How

else can we explain the events of the last 50+ years . . . genocide in Germany, the Soviet Union, Africa, Eastern Europe, and even America (40 million aborted babies).

Because of this, God sent the ultimate teacher—His Son Jesus Christ. Time and again He was addressed as “Rabbi” and He accepted the title. Jesus was a teacher. We need a teacher. The first reason I believe in Jesus Christ is because part of sin is ignorance. And Jesus Christ is God’s Rabbi.

Sin is a violation.

Have you ever seen a “No Trespassing” sign? And ignored it? If you’ve ever done so, then you have committed what the Old Testament defines as “*abar*.” That’s the word for sin we find in Hosea 6:7, “*Like Adam they have broken the covenant—they have become unfaithful to me there.*” To commit sin in the sense of “*abar*” is to violate any of God’s “No Trespassing” signs. In this sense, sin is a specific act—an individual violation of God’s standards.

If we’re honest, I think we can all find some moments in our lives wherein we crossed God’s boundaries and violated commandments. It can take the form of shading the truth or stealing from our workplace. The sin can be obvious and gross or subtle and yet still damaging. I don’t think anybody thinks they’re perfect. Not even Mary Poppins qualifies.

Now if you’ve wronged God, then the solution is God’s forgiveness. Isn’t it obvious that none of us can hope to have a relationship with God without forgiveness on God’s part being part of the equation? Sweet forgiveness. It’s basic to life. Even if you’re not a Christian, it’s probably not news to hear me say that Jesus Christ is the source of God’s forgiveness. In Matthew 9:6 Jesus stated that He had the authority to forgive sins.

Just the other day I heard a well-meaning Buddhist lady give her solution to the human predicament saying, “You find peace within your heart by changing your state of mind.” I disagree. I think you find peace of heart by having your sins forgiven. The Bible’s diagnosis is a bit deeper than that we *think* wrong. The Bible states that we *do* wrong. We “*abar*.” We trespass against God. We have a sin problem. And Jesus Christ is the embodiment of forgiveness. The dear Buddhist lady offers us peace with ourselves; Jesus Christ offers us peace with God. I don’t think you can have the former unless you have the latter.

I don’t know about you, but I have violated God’s “No Trespassing” signs. I have committed sin in the sense of “*abar*.” I need to be forgiven. No wonder I believe in Jesus Christ. How about you?

Sin is a trap.

Sin would be costly enough if it were merely ignorance or violation. But it is more. The Bible teaches that sin is a trap. Every time we commit any single sin we increase the chances that we will sin again. You see, it’s

. . . Derek Prince puts it, “Dabble with the devil with just your fingertip and before you know it he has caught hold of you clear up to your

not so much that cocaine is addictive—o that alcohol or cigarettes or food or anger i addictive. The real truth is that sin i addictive. We probably learned this wher we told our first lie. Suddenly it became necessary to tell another lie to cover the first—and then a third to cover the second. Before long, lying seemed necessary . . . then it became easy.

This is the thought behind Genesis 3 and the serpent’s seduction of Eve. She protested when he first tempted her to disobey God. Eve recited God’s take on sin—“*when we eat of it we shall die.*” The serpent’s response? “You won’t die.” The trap was set by deception and Eve took the bait. Suddenly she (and then Adam) were caught in sin’s trap. Disobedience resulted in death in every sense of the word.

Whenever we commit an individual sin (“*abar*”), we quickly find that we are in over our heads. I love the way Derek Prince puts it, “Dabble with the devil with just your fingertip and before you know it he has caught hold of you clear up to your elbow.” It isn’t just that we take hold of sin. Sin takes hold of us. We’re like animals caught in a trap.

While it’s tempting to dismiss the story of Eve’s deception as an ancient fairy tale, it accurately describes what many still experience. For example, the warning signs are up regarding alcohol, drugs, sexual immorality, gambling, indebtedness, laziness, greed, etc. Yet countless numbers of folks ignore the signs. Convinced they can manage their indulgences, they eventually learn that it is their appetites that rule them. Ask the drug addict. The gambling addict. The food addict. The person controlled by fear—or credit cards—or ambition—or laziness—or immorality . . . or the need to be accepted. Anyone who is honest about it will tell you we cannot manage sin. Sin manages us. Ezekiel the prophet put it in terms that are a bit more biting than we’re comfortable with, “*The soul who sins shall die.*” (Ezekiel 18:20) Despite appearances to the contrary, sin remains a trap.

Jesus Christ is the answer for those entrapped by sin. He said, quite simply, “*If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.*” Paul

the Apostle stated that through Jesus Christ we have the power of the resurrection at work in our lives. As I grew up I learned the sad truth that sin was more than ignorance and more than an act. It was a trap. Sin took hold of me. I could not escape. There comes a point where you've broken too many New Year's resolutions to make another. I believe in Jesus Christ because He set me free from sin's trap. When Christ became my Savior, I was given the freedom to choose a path in life other than self-destruction.

Sin is a disease . . . Genesis 6:12 ("shacoth")

"God saw how corrupt the earth had become for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways."

Corruption is the fourth facet in the dark gem of sin. Sin corrupts. It's like a disease that spreads throughout the blood stream and affects every part of a person. Sin isn't self-contained.

Until we grasp that sin is a corruptor, we'll be tempted to view our lives as a series of good works and bad works. From this it seems to follow that if we only do more good things than bad things, then we should be acceptable to God. After all, that's only fair. The key is to make the moral scales tip in our direction.

According to this take on righteousness and sin, the individual acts of our lives could be viewed as individual glasses. Each time we do or speak, each time we exercise our will, it's like another glass we fill. When we do good, it's like a glass of milk—something wholesome and life giving. When we do bad, it would be like a glass filled with arsenic—a poison that harms us or others. Call this the "containerized" view of sin.

The problem with this view is that it doesn't grasp the Biblical concept of "*shacoth*," the Hebrew word for corruption. Once sin is in our lives, it spreads and touches everything, bringing corruption. To return to the glass analogy, it would be far more accurate if we were to take our "milk glasses"—our righteous acts—and put a few drops of arsenic in every cup. Isn't it true that everything we do is to some degree touched by sin? Even our so-called righteous acts have been affected. Even when preaching a sermon, part of me is thinking about shoring up my reputation as a good preacher. That's pride. Ego. That's dangerous stuff. It is sin. In other

words, God needs to forgive me even for my attempts to serve Him. (The miracle is that He still uses even our very flawed efforts.)

Scripture makes it clear that sin has touched every part of our lives. It is pervasive, and so everything has been tinged by the "arsenic" of disobedience. This is why I believe in Jesus Christ. I need not only to be taught—I need not only to be forgiven—I need not only to be set free—I need a new nature. I have been corrupted. Sin has touched every part of me. *I need to become a new person.* And Jesus Christ offers just this . . . "*Except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.*" There is a new person living inside of me, taking over my life bit by bit. This gift came to me by virtue of my faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you're convinced you can turn over a new leaf, be my guest. However, if you've come to the place where you somehow must become a new person—reborn—with a new nature and a new set of thoughts and desires . . . If you are in need of a radical change, then may I commend to you the only real answer: Jesus Christ living inside of you.

Sin is a power . . . Job 20:22 ("amel")

"In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will come upon him."

"Amel" is also a Hebrew word. Here it translates as "misery." The word picture in Job is a graphic one . . . being under the power of some unforeseen and perhaps unseen crisis. In this day and age we might speak of being overtaken by depression or perhaps rage. Modern and ancient people alike know what it is to be in the grip of a power too strong to handle. Paul the Apostle speaks about being "*the slave of sin.*" As Job pictures being overtaken by misery, Paul pictures being under the power of sin.

Did you know that sin has a legal claim on our lives? You see, it wasn't merely that I committed sin or that I was trapped by sin or that I was corrupted by sin. It was even worse—I was owned by sin. I was its slave. The Biblical picture of sin is that it has the right to tell us what to do. The addict confirms this every time he shoots up. He knows that drugs control his desires and make his decisions for him. Similarly, fear or bitterness can control our lives. How many people are in control of their lives and how many people find that their lives are controlled by some set of desires, thoughts, or emotions? Many people experience only periods of apparent freedom and then suddenly find themselves at the whim of their passion once again. Sin is a cruel owner that occasionally yanks on the chain tied to

our souls simply to remind us who is boss. Until sin is dealt with we will never be free.

Enter Jesus Christ the Redeemer. A redeemer is someone who purchases a slave only to set him free. The Bible makes it clear that God is in the redemption business. God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Boaz redeemed the destitute Ruth through a land purchase so that she could be his wife. Paul appealed to Philemon to release his slave Onesimus. And Jesus Christ exercised His right to redeem us from sin.

The truth of the matter is that each of us needs a new owner. Jesus Christ is that Owner. He has the ability to do what no man can do for another. Jesus Christ can purchase the soul. No wonder I believe in Him.

Sin is emptiness . . . Psalm 66:18 ("aven")

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."

The word translated "sin" here in Psalm 66:18 means "emptiness" or "vanity." It also can be translated as "idol." To have an idol is to invest meaning or power in something that is lifeless and powerless. It's the same word used in Psalm 101:3 when David vows that he will set no *wicked* thing before his eyes. A modern expression of this would be much—though not all—of television. Biblical wisdom views sin as waste, and it views investing our lives into that which is a waste as sin.

Our society invests much in the foolish and invests little in the things of value. Now our society has institutionalized waste in the form of government lotteries. I shake my head every time I walk into a convenience store and find a poor person buying \$20 worth of lottery tickets. Their act is "*aven*"—it is a waste.

On the other end of the socioeconomic scale, I was recently speaking with a friend who is the CEO of a major multi-national corporation. He hates his job. He believes it is sucking the life out of him. For all his prestige, he lives without meaning. He is simply discovering the truth of "*aven*." Even great success is empty apart from relationship with God.

Against all the opportunities to waste life stands Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle spoke of Him this way . . . "*Christ in me is to live.*" In other words, to know and obey Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of life. Similarly, Jesus Himself said, "*This is life eternal, to know Thee the one true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.*" He said of Himself that He was "*the way, the truth, and the life.*" Jesus Christ is the meaning of life.

I have tested it and proven it. The more fully I invest my life in Jesus Christ, the more meaning and joy there is in life. Anything taken and joined to Christ's kingdom suddenly comes alive. Anything divorced from Jesus Christ—no matter how good—inevitably turns to ashes.

Sin is separation from God . . . Isaiah 59:2

"But your iniquities have separated you from God . . ."

Sin separates us from God. Is there anything more basic—or anything more obvious with regard to man's condition? Recently, I was in Texas visiting my ill brother. I had several opportunities to speak with critically ill patients about belief in God. The Christians I ran into knew God. They had access to Him. Despite their illnesses they sensed God's nearness. The non-Christians felt God was at a distance. They sensed the separation. In other words, those who had trusted Christ to remove their sin found themselves in the arms of God. Those who didn't found that God remained largely a stranger to them.

Let me ask you a question. Straight up. Is God near to you—or far away? Could the problem be as basic as unresolved sin? I think this is the case for untold numbers of people. The deepest part of us cries out for God and yet He remains illusive. Scripture tells us that there is an answer to the divorce between heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is our link to God. He brings us back home. Because His death on the cross deals with sin and puts it away forever, when we come to Him in faith our separation from God is banished. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "*There is only one God [dub!], and Christ Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God.*" (1 Timothy 2:5)

"Christ Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God." That's a controversial statement and I know it. It wasn't politically correct in Paul's day either. The Roman caesars put Christians to death for statements such as this. Yet I believe it's true. The reason Jesus alone is the way to God is because the Bible alone recognizes that man's problem isn't that he hasn't evolved enough. Or that man isn't enlightened enough. Or that man hasn't been freed up enough to find his inner self. *Man's problem is that he is separate from God.* And sin is the cause of that separation. Jesus Christ alone dealt with sin. He isn't interested in our evolution. He is interested in our restoration to God Himself.

Does this business of separation from God because of sin seem difficult to grasp? Think of it in human terms. Have you ever had a broken relationship with someone because of wrongdoing? That person remains a

a distance until forgiveness is granted and received. I was talking with someone just this week who had sinned against a close friend 20 years ago. For two decades their relationship was strained, and they remained at a distance from one another. In the last few months they set it straight. The offending party confessed his sin. The other person forgave. They are now the best of friends once more. This is our position with God. We've sinned against Him, and we are at a distance from Him. Until we confess that sin and seek His forgiveness we remain distant from God. Jesus Christ alone is the answer for this predicament, because Christianity alone recognizes that this is man's position before God.

Sin is death . . . Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death."

You'll remember I said earlier that sin is our master. Sin is also our employer. And, like any reliable employer, sin pays wages. What is sin's paycheck? Death. Spiritual death. And eventually literal death. In case you haven't noticed it, people die. I am of the opinion that the grave is a most unnatural ending to life. I'm getting old enough that the reality of death is beginning to brush my life. I have family members and dear friends who are not far from the grave. It's one thing to be 25 and in good health. It's a bit easier to be cavalier about the grave and make stoic statements such as "all there is to life is this life." It's quite another when you are facing your own extinction. Suddenly, eternal life becomes an interesting topic, to say the least.

Jesus Christ is the final answer. He said of Himself, ***"I am the Resurrection."*** The final condition of mankind is death. Jesus offers the answer for that as well. Faith in Christ lands us in heaven and thus with God where we were meant to be all along. Don't you sense it within yourself? Don't you sense that you were made for more than the grave? It's true. This is one place where you can trust your instincts and your desires. You were made to live forever. You were made for God—to know God and to be with God. You were made for a much larger life than just this life. I believe in Jesus Christ because He offers the final answer for the ultimate penalty of sin. ***"While the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."***

Sín and Sín's Answer

So what do I see? I see that all the other philosophies and religion don't deal with man's real condition—sin. Rather than being on our way up via evolution, we are on our way down. Man is fighting a losing battle. The grave is only the last expression of sin's incremental death.

One of my favorite authors is Victor Hugo. Recently I reread section of his epic novel *Les Misérables*. In a particularly vivid chapter, Hugo described the lingering death of quicksand:

Along the coastline of Brittany or Scotland, it sometimes happens that a traveler or a fisherman, walking on the beach at low tide far from the bank, suddenly notices that for several minutes he has been walking with some difficulty. The beach beneath his feet is like pitch; his soles stick to it; it is no longer sand, it is glue. The beach is perfectly dry, but at every step he takes, as soon as he lifts his foot, the print fills up with water. The eye, however, has not noticed any change; the immense strand is smooth and tranquil, all the sand looks the same, nothing distinguishes the solid surface from the surface that is no longer so; the joyous little cloud of sand fleas continues to spring tumultuously over the wayfarer's feet. The man keeps on going forward, tending toward the land, endeavors to get nearer the upland. He is not anxious. Anxious about what? He somehow feels as if the weight of his feet increased with every step he takes. Suddenly he sinks in. He sinks in two or three inches. Decidedly he is not on the right path; he stops to take his bearings. All at once, he looks at his feet. His feet have disappeared. The sand covers them. He pulls his feet out of the sand, he wants to retrace his steps, he turns back, he sinks in deeper. The sand comes up to his ankles, he pulls out and lurches to the left, the sand is half a leg deep, he hurtles to the right, the sand comes up to his shins. Then he recognizes with unspeakable terror that he is caught in the quicksand, and that underneath him he has the terrifying medium in which man can no more walk than fish can swim. He throws off his load if he has one, he lightens himself like a ship in distress; it is already too late, the sand is above his knees.

He calls, he waves his hat or his handkerchief, the sand keeps gaining on him; if the beach is deserted, if the land is too far off, if the sandbank has too poor a reputation, if there is no hero in sight, it is all over, he is condemned to sink in. He is condemned to that appalling burial, long, infallible, implacable, impossible to slacken or to hasten, that goes on for hours, that will not end, that seizes you erect, free and in full health, that sucks you down by the feet, that, with every attempted effort, at every shout, drags you a little deeper, that appears to punish you for your resistance by strengthening its grip, that pulls the man slowly into the earth while leaving him all the time to look at the horizon,

the trees, the green fields, the smoke of the villages on the plain, the sails of the ships on the sea, the birds flying and singing, the sunshine, the sky. . . The victim attempts to sit, to lie down, to creep; every movement he makes buries him; he straightens up, he sinks in; he feels that he is being swallowed up; he howls, implores, shrieks to the clouds, writhes, despairs. See him waist-deep in the sand; the sand reaches his breast, he is now only a bust. He raises his arms, utters furious groans, clutches the beach with his nails, wants to hold onto that straw, leans on his elbows to pull himself out of this soft sheath, sobs in a frenzy; the sand rises. The sand reaches his shoulders, the sand reaches his neck; the face alone is now visible. The mouth cries, the sand fills it; silence. The eyes still stare, the sand shuts them; night. Then the forehead decreases, a little hair flutters above the sand; a hand protrudes, comes through the surface of the beach, moves and shakes, and disappears. Sinister obliteration of a man.

This, my friends, is sin. Sin is slow and inescapable death in every sense of the word. What could make more sense? If God is Life and if sin separates us from God, then to be apart from God is to be in a kind of living and irreversible death. Sin is like quicksand—it eventually swallows us alive.

Why do I believe in Jesus Christ? I do so because I believe the Bible accurately describes man's condition: sin. And because the Bible has truthfully diagnosed our condition, I trust what the Bible prescribes as the Answer: God's own Son.

This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me."

In light of the gravity of sin and John the Baptist's confidence that Jesus Christ is God's Lamb who takes away the world's sin, the next verse seems only logical. "**He surpasses me.**" As another translation puts it, "**He is greater than I.**" Did you know that Jesus Christ is "greater than"? This is what John figured out. It's what I figured out. Sin is a bummer. It is real. And powerful. And far deeper than even we believers normally admit to ourselves. But Jesus Christ is our Hero on the beach who rescues us from the quicksand of sin.

*Sin is man's predicament. Jesus Christ is God's Answer. He is greater than.
Sin is a lie. And Jesus Christ is the Truth. He is greater than.
Sin is ignorance and Jesus Christ is the Teacher. He is greater than.
Sin is a diversion and Jesus Christ is the Way. He is greater than.
Sin is darkness and Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. He is greater than.*

Sin is trespass against God and Jesus Christ said, "I have authority to forgive sins. He is greater than.

Sin is a trap and Jesus Christ sets us free for "whomever the Son sets free is free indeed." He is greater than.

Sin is an addiction and Jesus Christ is our bondage breaker. He is greater than.

Sin corrupts our nature and Jesus Christ gives us a new nature. He is greater than.

Sin is a power and Jesus Christ gives us the power of the Holy Spirit. He is greater than.

Sin is a failed life and Jesus Christ gives us a new life for "behold if any man is in Christ he is a new creation." He is greater than.

Sin is a stain and Jesus Christ washes us clean. He is greater than.

Sin is separation from God and Jesus Christ is our link to God. He is greater than.

Sin is slavery and Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. He is greater than.

Sin is emptiness and Jesus Christ is the meaning of life. He is greater than.

Sin is foolishness and Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. He is greater than.

Sin renders us guilty and Jesus Christ takes our punishment. He is greater than.

Sin is distortion and Jesus Christ is the measure of all things. He is greater than.

Sin is rebellion against God and Jesus Christ is our Atonement. He is greater than.

Sin is missing the mark and Jesus Christ lived without sin. He is greater than.

Sin is death and Jesus Christ is the Resurrection. He is greater than.

Sin is eternal punishment and Jesus Christ is the giver of Eternal Life. He is greater than.

Sin is the negation of all things, Jesus Christ is the sum of all things for "all things were made by Him and through Him and for Him." Indeed, He is greater than.

I cannot find a problem that Jesus Christ isn't greater than. In fact John the Baptist wasn't the only person to sense that Jesus was "greater than." Peter sensed it in John 1:42 when he first met Jesus and the Messiah looked at him and said, "**You are Simon son of John. You will be called Peter.**" In that moment, Peter was captured by the One who was "greater than."

John's storyline continues as one by one real people are drawn in to the mystery of Jesus Christ: **The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee He found Philip and said simply, "Follow me."** In just two words Jesus Christ claimed Philip heart and soul. Why? Because Philip sensed what John the Baptist sensed. He is "greater than."

Then Jesus saw Nathaniel and said to him, "**Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile.**" Nathaniel's response made it clear that he heard the same voice . . . "**How do you know me?**" Jesus answered, "**saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.**" Then Nathaniel declared, "**Rabbi, You are the Son of God.**"

What makes a man speak words of such conviction so quickly? I believe that Nathaniel sensed what John sensed. Here was a man. A person. A Someone. A Figure who surpassed him. Someone who was beyond him. Someone who was larger than he.

When Jesus turned the water to wine in Cana at Galilee, they marveled. At the wine? No—at the man. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus revealed His glory in the miracle. In other words, they sensed something so much larger in Him. He surpassed them and they knew it. Did they know that the Messiah would mean so much more than political deliverance for Israel? No. That would come later. Did they know He would be a suffering Messiah who would die for their sins? No. That would come later. Did they know that He would be raised from the dead? No. That would come later. Did they know He was God in the flesh? No. That would come later.

But for the moment, for all they didn't yet know, John's words echoed in their own spirits. He surpassed them. He was mysterious. Good. Deep. Wise. Powerful. He was more than they could ever grasp but not more than they could worship—and worship seemed the only appropriate response. He was "greater than."

I understand the feelings. They have become my own. Even as I sat in Dallas in my brother's hospital room—as he struggled with leukemia in his brain and in his body—I sensed this Figure who surpassed me. And suddenly He was in that hospital room with us. Bigger than both of us. Bigger than our sin. Bigger than our failures. Bigger than our dreams. Bigger than our ambitions. Bigger than his leukemia. Bigger even than our understanding of Him. I could no longer speak. Neither could my brother. We both sensed Him. Pure power. Holiness. Goodness. Healing. Forgiveness. Hope. Wisdom. Mystery.

Why do I believe in Jesus Christ? I believe in Jesus because He surpasses me. He is beyond me. He is "greater than." He is more than I can ever grasp but not more than I can worship. In fact, worship seems the only appropriate response. In a world of special effects, Madison Avenue hype, human pride, and human weakness, I have found the One who is "greater than." Jesus Christ.

I have no choices left. I must believe.

Questions for Reflection

1. What say you? Is mankind's plight as desperate as Scripture portrays?
2. Reflect on this statement: Our view of Jesus Christ will be no greater our grasp of sin's seriousness.
3. Is Scripture's intent to make us feel condemned or to point us to forgiveness?
4. Have you been able to solve the sin problem in your life? Or do you yourself in a life setting similar to my little girl and her spilled nail polish? Have your efforts at "cleaning up" your failures only compounded problems? Have you grasped the truth? You're in over your head. You don't have the answer to sin. What about taking God up on His offer through Jesus Christ, "Why don't you let Me do that for you? I can clean."

Lord Jesus, could it be true? Are You really bigger than my sins and my confusion? I choose now to believe. Forgive me. Accept me into Your kingdom. You are now my Lord.