

**Text:** Various

**Title:** The Impossibility of Salvation

**Truth:** The incarnation and substitution are how an impossible salvation became possible.

**Date/Location:** December 24, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

Once humanity departed from their creator's ways, we came into an impossibly bad situation. God had said to our first parents Adam and Eve, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that [when] you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). After rebelling against God's direction, they still had the power of pro-creation, so before their natural vitality slipped away, they began to create a race we know as humanity. Because of their departure from God, every member of this race is doomed from the beginning of life to suffer and die.

**Illustration:** Space Shuttle Columbia disaster in February of 2003.

"On Feb. 1, 2003, space shuttle Columbia broke up as it returned to Earth, killing the seven astronauts on board. NASA suspended space shuttle flights for more than two years as it investigated the disaster. An investigation board determined that a large piece of foam fell from the shuttle's external tank and breached the spacecraft wing. This problem with foam had been known for years..."<sup>1</sup>

The problem happened during lift-off. Ever after that point, the mission was doomed to destruction upon its return because hot gases from its re-entry entered the damaged wing and destroyed the spacecraft.

It is the same with humanity: from birth, we are doomed because the "wages of sin is death." As with a broken wing on the Space Shuttle, there seems to be no way to fix the fatal flaw that we have.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.space.com/19436-columbia-disaster.html>

<sup>2</sup> The idea of closer inspection of the shuttle was a good one, but it was set aside. If information had been

All Scripture is from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

## I. For People, Salvation is Impossible

- A. Sin is universal among humanity, Eccl. 7:20. We cannot change ourselves to become non-sinners. Can the leopard change his spots (Jer. 13:23)? Our nature is broken, and we cannot fix it. Thus we are all in the same life raft and there is no one “outside the boat” who can rescue us.
- B. Sin has a built-in, unavoidable, natural consequence—death, Romans 6:23 and 5:12. It’s like when you cut yourself—naturally, it hurts. When you sin, naturally, you are guilty and due the punishment of the just Judge of all. Beyond that, it causes damage in the relationships of people; of the relationship of humanity to nature; and of the relationship of humanity with God.
- C. Each person must address their own sin, Ezekiel 18:20. Neither sin nor goodness can be transferred from father to son or vice versa. When you take a test at school, you cannot give it to someone else to take it—you have to take it yourself!
- D. God is holy and cannot accept a sinful sacrifice in exchange for one’s soul. Hab. 1:13. He requires a lamb *without blemish*. You can’t use dirt to clean up dirt!
- E. All kinds of human-originated sacrifices are insufficient because of the above principle.
  - 1. For example, Micah 6:6-7 indicates that burnt offerings, year-old calves, thousands of rams or great amounts of olive oil will not satisfy God’s judicial sentence against sinners because of their sin. Not even one’s own child could be sacrificed in exchange for eternal life as payment for the rebellion of a sinner. Pagans often did that in centuries gone by, to no good effect.
  - 2. Good works are filthy to God, Isaiah 64:6.
  - 3. Good works cannot undo the infinite and eternal consequences of previous bad works. Water under the bridge cannot be clawed back!
- F. If a person were to offer himself as a sacrifice, all that does is result in that person’s death and entrance into eternal condemnation.

This is because the sinful person himself or herself is not a suitable holy and clean sacrifice.

G. Even the animal sacrifices carried out by the Israelite priesthood were only temporary and incomplete. Hebrews 10:1-4. It's like you are cleaning the floor of your room, and your brother is at the doorway throwing handfuls of Legos on the floor, so you can barely keep up. You will never finish! So it is with sin!

When these sacrifices were offered without an attitude of faith, it was even worse. Isaiah 1:11.

H. What about keeping God's law, can that do it? Only in a purely hypothetical way can law-keeping provide salvation, but the nature of man precludes it as a realistic possibility. Anyway, no law can produce righteousness; it can only point out sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

Conclusion: What can a man give in exchange for his soul (Matt. 16:26)? No good works, no personal sacrifice, no sacrifice of animals, and no sacrifice of other sinful human beings are sufficient. In corollary, no good intentions, no acts of love, no moral reformation, nothing we do can earn merit with God. The situation seems to be impossible.

Then how can a man be righteous before God (Job 25:4)?

I. Now, we know from the Old Testament that the One who was prophesied to be Savior of the world was to be both a Savior *and* Israel's future king. In Psalm 110:1-4, the Messiah is clearly both king and priest.

But another impossibility arises at this very point. God pronounced a curse about 2500 years ago upon a man named Jeconiah and his descendants. God said that none of his descendants would prosper on the throne of Israel (Jer. 22:28-30). His rejection of God did not condemn his sons; but it did have severe consequences on them.

The New Testament tells us that Joseph was a descendant of this Jeconiah, and Joseph was the "father" of Jesus. So is Jesus tainted by the curse? Could he not rule over Israel because of the ancestral

curse on Jeconiah? How could He fulfill all his prophetic role? It seems impossible.

Now what? The hope of the world seems lost. Something happened that solved this problem.

## II. But with God...

Now, I know all the Christian people out there are saying, "Wait a second, salvation is *not* impossible, because Jesus is the Savior of the world." True enough, but have you stopped to consider just how impossible your salvation is, in light of all that we have said above?

Matthew 19:24-26 says, "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, **but with God all things are possible.**"

## III. Salvation is Made Possible in Jesus Christ

A. Incarnation. The incarnation is the doctrine that expresses the Christian teaching of what happened when Jesus came into the world.

1. He was miraculously conceived and born of a virgin to avoid the stain of human sin. This is the miracle of the virgin conception and birth—not the so-called *immaculate conception* of Mary. This meant that He *could* offer Himself for the sins of others because He had none that disqualified Himself! He *was* the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
2. He was of the lineage of David not only through Solomon as Joseph was, but also through Nathan (Luke 3:23-38) down to Mary. This cleared him of the Jeconiah curse, and thus enabled him to fulfill His entire prophetic role of priest and king.
3. The virgin birth was the means that allowed the pre-existing Son of God—already a person of the Godhead—to enter into

humanity without a new person being created, as always happens in normal conception when a new baby is formed. This miracle not only avoided the stain of sin, but also the creation of a new person. The incarnation was the way God came “down” to mankind to solve the sin problem Himself!

4. By the incarnation, the Son of God could once again dwell among His people. “Immanuel” is “God with us.” This is God’s ultimate design for His relationship with human beings. Sin interrupted that, but not so badly that God could not enter into fellowship with His creatures again.

B. Substitution. One big problem remains. What happened to the axiom that “the souls who sins must die”? On our side, it is insurmountable. You have to take your own test; your brother cannot take your test for you! You have to take your own punishment; you cannot get your sister to take it for you!

Here is what happened: God graciously permitted that a substitute could make the infinite payment for your sin. He modeled this in the Old Testament with the animal sacrifices such as the lamb, upon which one would place their hand to symbolically transfer their guilt (Lev. 1:4). Another example is the scapegoat (Lev. 16:8-10) which would symbolically carry guilt away into the wilderness.

Jesus Christ is that perfect, infinite lamb who can take away the sins not only of one, but of many, indeed, infinitely many people because of the nature of His work. Thus it can be said that Christ “died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). He was wounded and bruised for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5). He took your place. We should sometime review again all that the doctrine of substitution entails. It is *critical* to our faith.

But you have to reach out a hand to him, so to speak, by turning from your sin and in the same turn, turning to Christ, the Lord and Savior.

## Conclusion

As a result:

The Christian’s sins are placed behind God’s back, Isaiah 38:17.

The Christian's sins are removed as far as east and west, Psalm 103:12.

The Christian's sins cast into the depth of the sea, Micah 7:19.

After all is said and done, salvation *is* possible—not by our own devices—by the incarnation and substitution of God-in-the-flesh!

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