

Did Jesus volunteer to be our Savior?

2007 One God Conference
By Mel Hershberger

A local radio ministry in my area closes their program with the statement “if you believe that Jesus is God and that he paid the penalty for your sins, you will have eternal life”. Of course I would respond, which scripture demands that I believe that Jesus was God in order to be saved? None. However, with that belief comes the idea and teaching that a preexisting Jesus volunteered to come to earth and die for us. Is that true? Or are there scriptures that paint a different picture? We might ask why Jesus asked for that cup to pass if he volunteered. How would the Father have acted in the same situation? Do we realize that He would have responded somewhat differently when approaching the crucifixion? And why would that be? Some seem to think that Jesus had to experience pain and death so that the Godhead could fully realize what that’s like. Is that the reason? If it is, then how could God know that He didn’t make a mistake in the level of pain He created for all those who lived before Christ’s death? And if a mistake was made, when was He going to fix it? Well let’s see if we can determine whether he volunteered or not?

Phil. 2 is often cited to express this idea that Jesus volunteered to come to earth to die for us. This has been gone through in detail at these conferences perhaps more than once. I don’t want to spend the time to do a detailed analysis but do want to do a review. I know Gary Fakhoury has taken us through it and maybe I have to volunteer him to answer any questions that might be brought up for that section. V.1-“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, v.2-make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. V.3-Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (what we’re receiving here is direction and admonishment to follow Christ. A theme of humility comes through)

V.4-do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others. V.5-Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Paul again expresses our need to have the attitude of Christ which he will define for us) V.6-who, although He existed in the form of God, (form=morphe 3444-visual form, not nature) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (would we not think that if we had God for a Father in the way Jesus had, that it would tend to make us think pretty highly of ourselves? But Jesus did not grasp to be God or to be called God. Let’s notice a text in 1 Cor. 11:7 before we continue here. The chap. that talks about short hair, caps, wigs etc.) V.7-“For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he **is the image** and glory of God; but the woman, is the glory of man. (Man is now in the image of God. Surely we would not say that makes us God). Let’s continue with Phil. With v. 7-but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (I think we should view this as an attitude. What did he empty himself of? Look at) V.8-Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross. (Jesus didn’t grasp at being God. He emptied Himself of that notion and clothed Himself in humility.) V.9-For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him, the name which is above every name,” It is good to notice that Jesus was promoted, not restored to a previous position.

Let's go to Heb. 1:1-2. This text is often cited as proof for Jesus' preexistence. But does it really support that concept? V.1—"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, v.2--Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, (so we see here that God did not speak by His Son before these last days) whom He has appointed heir of all things, (I would conclude that if God appointed him heir, then the Son didn't do the creating, or else, he already would possess all wouldn't he?) **by** whom also he made the worlds;" (The preposition "by" from the Greek "dia" is the same word that is used in Mark 2:27 where it says that the Sabbath was made "for" man. Would we say the Sabbath was made through or by man? No, the text says that "the Sabbath was made **for** man." Would we not do well to follow the same principle here and say that the 'worlds' were made for him? And this isn't talking about the creation of the universe any way. The word for worlds here is *aion*, meaning age, not *kosmos* which means world. So the age was made for Christ. Nowhere here is it implied that Christ created the universe.

Jesus was chosen

Let's move over to Heb. 3:1-2—Remember the question before us is, did Jesus volunteer to come to earth to be our Savior? V.1 "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; v.2- He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house." Notice that Jesus was appointed. He didn't volunteer. And he certainly remained faithful to God. He was given a number of duties to fulfill. It even appears that he was given the option to back out of the crucifixion if he so chose. God however knew that he wouldn't let Him down.

Let's examine a text that shows that Jesus was allowed to walk away from this trial if he felt he needed to. John 10:18- This of course is where Jesus talks about the good shepherd and the sheep. V.18—"No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." It seems to me that Jesus is saying that he does not have to go through this sacrifice if it is too much for him to bear. There are enough scriptures that show a ruling Messiah, so that confirms that Jesus would not deny the Father's will and plan. There are also implications from several scriptures that the Father gave Jesus messages from time to time just as it says here.

Heb. 5:1-This is an important chapter to see what I'm talking about. Did Jesus volunteer? Let me just say that there are a few other texts that some use to espouse the idea that Jesus volunteered as well. V.1- "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; v.2- he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; (this is a very important point to understand. It is important for one's High Priest to grasp one's feelings and weaknesses. We must not conclude that the Father is deficient in this understanding of our pain and weakness. As Creator, He has to know what it's like for someone to be burned alive or for an earthworm to be eaten by a mole. Imagine for a moment that after 4000 yrs. God comes to understand through Christ's sacrifice that the level of pain is too extreme and He made a mistake. As our mediator in the NT, Christ understands our situation of course. If Christ needed to experience pain and suffering for the sake of some Godhead, then what does that do for all those who lived before him? That can't be correct. God does fully

grasp and understand this. Because of our humanity, we need a mediator with that experience. It's not for God's sake but ours.) V.3- and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. V.4-And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. V.5-So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You; (Can we see that Jesus did not volunteer? He didn't even appoint Himself to the lowly position of high priest compared to a preexistent God. That is never the way the Father acts. He is not bashful to let us know of His positions, offices, and titles. And rightfully so. I am God and there is none else he declares.)

In the next text we have a quote from one of the Psalms.V.6-just as He says also in another passage, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. V.7- In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, (this should read "through death") and He was heard because of His piety. (No flesh is saved from death, not even Christ's. That word is better translated 'through' as it is in chap. 2:14 which says—'that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death.' We also notice that he was declared a priest after the order of Melchizedek. It becomes quite clear that he wasn't Melchizedek in some previous life. It's an order of priest.

Some like to quote 'I am the Lord, I change not' and then proceed to claim proof that there is no change in the law or torah. But here in Heb we have a change from God. The priesthood changed for the 2nd time. And that in itself would change some things.) V.8-Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. V.9-And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation. V.10-being designated by God (Notice that the Father made the choice, Christ did not volunteer) as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Continuing V.11-Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. V.12-For though by this time you ought to be teachers, (Most from some of our tradition still believe that they should sit for 40 yrs. in services and never teach unless the minister said they may. And the minister does not know any better either. Sad.)

Turn over to chap.10:4—Some seem unaware that animal blood never took away sin. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. V.5- Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, But a body you have prepared for me; V.6- In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. V.7-Then I said, behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God." (So we see here Christ submitting to the Father's will. John 6:38--He came to do the Father's will, not his own. The Father designed the program and Christ accepted it. Christ did not volunteer for any of this.)

John 6:38—"For I have come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." All scriptures on the subject show that it was the Father's will, not the Son's will. The Son submitted and honored the Father's will. Mat. 26:38—Let's take a look at Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus' anguish

He suffered terribly that night in the garden. Mat. 26:38—"Then He said to them, My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me. V. 39—And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." We can all understand why Christ felt this way. Seeing what was before him was quite terrifying, and did He feel that He could go all the way through this without a single spiritual infraction? I do think He was confident that he was spiritually prepared. The experience of this prayer is where Jesus was different from the Father. This is what people fail to realize. If the Father could have become truly human, He would retain His identity and would still have been able to truly realize exactly what He would experience. He had created it. He really knows. It would not be an experience different from what He could have experienced in some vicarious way in His planning of what pain and suffering should feel like. God really could not be surprised by anything like that. We are the ones that cannot fully comprehend all this.

Jesus died for us

One of the primary reasons Jesus came was to die for us. Rom. 5:8- Most Christians believe that Jesus died in our place and paid the penalty for our sins. That's what I was taught. However, I'm quite sure that is not correct. I notice that Ray Wooten and some other ministries have come to understand this differently from the traditional explanation as well. 8—"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He did die for us but not in our stead. The Greek is 'huper' and is used as 'in interest of or behalf of. Not in place of or instead of. He redeemed us. It was a ransom price He paid. He died for our sins, not in place of them.

What was Adam told would happen if he disobeyed? That he would die. We do recognize that he died don't we? Then why would we not believe that he paid his penalty? V.12—"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" Adam did die for his sin. Everyone dies for their sins is what we read. If the penalty for sin is an ever burning hell, then Jesus did not pay it as He never went to hell for ever. We do understand that don't we? If it's eternal death, He didn't do that either. Then why do we not apply the same principle in this case? The penalty is death. This human death. We don't escape. One must pass through death to life. Jesus had a mortal body and had to pass through death as well. I'm sure we realize from our study of the One God that we could have some other errors as well. I've had to adjust my ideas more in the last 10yrs. then in the previous 25.

Turn to Rev. 22:16 and let's look at a text that is also misunderstood. It is said by some that the root of Jesse means that David sprang from Christ. V.16—"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." I states very clearly that Jesus sprang from David. The way root is used is as a metaphor for offspring. It is also defined as springing from a root. So there is no cause to claim that Jesus being the root of Jesse proves He preexisted.

Our faith attacked

Every year it seems there is a major assault on the Christian church. The Da Vinci Code disturbed a lot of people even though it is a novel. We had the Peter Jennings TV special which did not give people faith in the scriptures. We have the several other gospels as well as one of Judas which again is not in the same vein as the 4 gospels. Now let's see, did he really get the chance to write it before he hung himself? All the other apostles waited for decades before they wrote their stories. And we now have among us an assault on Jesus and the NT. There is no question that there are problematic texts. I have concluded from what I have examined that if we were all given an uncorrupted copy of an original text, we would all be shaken to our very core. One point I've come to realize this spring is that the disciples never asked Jesus in Mat. 24 when he would come again as in a literal 2nd coming. If I'm not mistaken it was around 1844 when perhaps the modern movement of the second coming date setting began in some of our history. It has taken on much more life in the last century. I do believe in the NT and in the return of Christ I do find it puzzling however why the scriptures have so many statements that give the skeptics food. For example, what does it mean to say that the text is inspired and Paul says "we which are alive" which is not accurate? Just some food for thought. I just don't think it's fair for me to be the only one bombarded with these things.

Some do accept Jesus as the Messiah but with a human father. And claim that he didn't receive the Holy Spirit until his baptism. The NT is quite clear that he had not sinned. Now I would challenge anyone to name one person with a normal IQ who has not lied before the age of 6. If you are familiar with little ones, you will find that a 2 or 3 yr. old will lie before he can understand what it means to tell only the truth. They will do this without learning it from others. If Jesus was a mere man with a human father, how was he the only human in history to keep from sinning? Especially without access to the Holy Spirit? Why couldn't his brother James match him? Or John the Baptist, the greatest born among women? I do find that those who mount these attacks are often very Torah oriented. According to them, if there is a change in the NT, then the change is wrong, hence the NT is wrong.

I think what is too often not realized is that the OT contains a covenant between God and Israel. The NT explains a new covenant between God and spiritual Israel with a plan of salvation. I know this is a very simplistic approach. But I do find the NT to be vital. Much if not all the NT quotes from the OT is from the Septuagint which differs from the Heb. in a number of places. So the question would be, is that translation inspired? It would appear to me that it is since it is the source for the NT. But why wouldn't God inspire an English version? Maybe we wouldn't be here debating the One God issue. However, I think we all benefit from our fellowship. So if the NT isn't true, then the issue of Christ volunteering to come and die for us is a moot point. However, I find whether the NT is true or not, either way, Christ did not volunteer but was appointed.