

# Christ ALONE

Topical

19 November 2017 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Idea:** Christ ALONE is sufficient to save us.

**Big Question:** Do I need anything more than faith in Jesus to be right with God?

## Introduction

What a sight it is, standing there as they enter town to great fanfare.

Processions like this don't come to town very often.

You've heard all the stories from neighbouring towns, of course, but seeing the papal coat of arms flapping in the breeze is something else.

And there's the man carrying the velvet cushion with gold trim.

There on the cushion, in pride of place, are the large, all-important pieces of paper.

The procession slowly winds its way into the centre of town as everyone in watches on.

Then the crowd gathers in as the great Johann Tetzl takes his place in front of a large cross that's been built in the market place.

Silence descends as he begins to speak on the topic of hell.

He's a good speaker and you feel yourself getting drawn in by his passion.

His description of hell is so vivid that you can almost feel the warmth of the flames licking around your feet as you stand in the sun.

That's something you're determined not to experience for real.

Then his sermon changes topic and he begins talking about purgatory— that holding place which lies between death and heaven.

He reminds of your relatives who are there right now, waiting to serve the remainder of their sentence before they can graduate to heaven.

In your imagination, you can hear their screams of agony as they suffer in agonizing pain because of their sins.

They're calling out to you from the grave, begging that you would do something to relieve their suffering.

Here's Tetzel's own words:

*Don't you hear the voices of your wailing dead parents and others who say, 'Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, because we are in severe punishment and pain. From this you could redeem us with a small alms and yet you do not want to do so.' Open your ears as the father says to the son and the mother to the daughter, 'We have created you, fed you, cared for you, and left you our temporal goods. Why then are you so cruel and harsh that you do not want to save us, though it only takes a little? You let us lie in flames so that we only slowly come to the promised glory.' You may have letters which let you have, once in life and in the hour of death full remission of the punishment which belongs to sin.*

You hear Tetzel say that you have the power to free your loved ones from the misery of purgatory.

All you have to do is buy one of the indulgences sitting on the velvet pillow and they will instantly be free to be upgraded to heaven.

As you consider the inheritance that your relatives left you, how could you possibly live with yourself if you were to squander it on yourself rather than freeing them?

It was situations like this that led Martin Luther to nail his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle just over 500 years ago.

Luther was deeply troubled – disturbed even – by the way indulgences were being peddled by Tetzel.

All he wanted was to start a discussion, but one thing led to another, which led to a major reformation of the church.

Five key concepts of the Christian faith were recovered in the Reformation.

They've since been summarised with these five 'alone' statements:

Salvation is by Grace ALONE  
Through Faith ALONE  
In Christ ALONE  
According to Scripture ALONE  
To the Glory of God ALONE.

They're all great truths but if I had to choose one as my favourite, it'd probably be the one we're looking at today – Christ ALONE.

Last week, we looked at faith alone.

It's not all that uncommon for people to say, "But I don't have enough faith."

How much faith you have isn't really the point though.

One day, the apostles came to Jesus, asking him for more faith.

This was his reply:

*Luke 17:6 (NIV11) <sup>6</sup> He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*

You only need the tiniest amount of faith to be saved.

Think of a bottle of whole-grain mustard and how small the seeds are.

What really matters isn't so much how much faith you have, but who you place your trust in.

It's all about Jesus.

Our hope as Christians stands and falls on what Jesus has done.

He's the one who has paid for our sins by dying on the cross so that we can have life.

*1 Peter 2:24 (NIV11) <sup>24</sup> "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."*

Only Jesus can save.

In the early days of Christianity, two of Jesus' disciples – Peter and John – were hauled before the Jewish high priest Caiaphas.

When they were asked who or what they were preaching and Peter replied,

*Acts 4:12 (NIV11) <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

Christ ALONE has done everything we need to make us right with God.

## Outline

One of the reasons that reformation is so significant is because it reclaimed the truth that Jesus is enough.

Christ ALONE is sufficient to save us.

We're not helped along to salvation by the treasury of the church, family, friends, work, education or anything else.

But Christ ALONE.

We're going to see how this was obscured in two critical ways in the time before the Reformation:

- The Problem of Penance
- The Melodrama of the Mass

## The Problem of Penance

The Roman Catholic church would say, "Yes, yes. We couldn't agree more.

"No one else can save us from hell, only Jesus Christ.

"But it's through the church that we receive God's grace.

"The sacraments are also necessary, because that's how we receive God's grace."

Can you see how in effect they added the sacraments to Jesus?

Salvation becomes Jesus plus the sacraments through the church.

The medieval church placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

The church that men like Zwingli and Luther found themselves in taught that through baptism, our sins are forgiven.

But what happens when you sin after you've been baptised?

They believed that while Jesus is the only one that you can trust in to be rescued from the eternal consequences of sin, they also taught that satisfaction needed to be made for sin.

Jesus saves you from hell, but there are still amends that need to be made here on earth.

In a book released this year, a Roman Catholic theologian writes:

*“Christ has paid the penalty of sin and has perfectly forgiven us, but we nonetheless must go through the penitential experience of suffering and death so as to be fully configured to him in love.”<sup>2</sup>*

The medieval theology developed the idea that sin in the life of the believer needed to be dealt with through the sacrament of penance.

The need for penance was made popular by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup>

‘Penance’ is a very “churchy” word that isn’t used very often.

However, North Americans use the term ‘penitentiary’ – a place where a person does time for serious crime.

Penance is doing the time for the crime.

As part of this sacrament of penance, you go to a priest sorrowful for the sins that you’d committed and confess what you have done.

He then absolves you of your sin and sets what is required for satisfaction to be made for those sins.

Penance is about contrition, confession and satisfaction.

The whole idea of purgatory flowed out of this.

The idea of purgatory is probably quite familiar to you – it’s really not that different from a gym.

There were some who said that you would receive 7 years in purgatory for every sin.

In weight-loss speak, “A moment on the lips – a lifetime on the hips.”

Like a gym, purgatory is the holding cell where you could work off any satisfaction that you couldn’t during your life on earth, just like you work off extra calories at the gym.

That’s two ideas – the need for penance to make satisfaction for your sin and purgatory to work it off.

In the thirteenth century, theologians also came up with a third related idea – that the church had a “treasury of merit”.

This is a pool of excess merit came from Jesus, Mary and the saints.

They said that these people were so godly that they had left-over merit which belonged to the church.

Pope Clement IV proclaimed that this surplus merit could be dispensed through indulgences.<sup>4</sup>

Indulgences were the sixteenth century version of Woolworths Rewards or Flybuys.

You could skip the gym of purgatory and use your points to take time off your account instead.

In fact, they said an indulgence had the power to absolutely remove all the punishment for your sins.

How did you get your hands on these indulgences?

They could be earned.

To begin with, they were used to reward the soldiers who fought in the Crusades against the Ottomans.

Over time, this was extended to include making pilgrimages to view relics.

Prince Frederick the Wise kept a whole heap of relics the Castle at Wittenberg where Martin Luther was teaching.

He spent large sums of money travelling all over the world building his collection of 19,000 trinkets.<sup>5</sup>

They included a piece of the burning bush, soot from the fiery furnace, milk from Mary (I guess it was yoghurt by then), straw from the stable Jesus was born in, a splinter from Jesus' crib, one of the children massacred by Herod, a thorn from Jesus' crown and a piece of his cross.

People would line up to pay to see these, not because of their historical value, but because they were worth 1,900,000 days of indulgences.

Cardinal Albrecht calculated that looking at the collection could take 39,245,120 years off purgatory.

And if you believe that, have I got the deal with you.

Actually, someone else did.

Indulgences could also be bought.

You could circumvent making satisfaction by paying compensation instead.

In other words – as some people put it – penance became about contrition, confession and compensation.

Not only that, Pope Sixtus went further, saying that indulgences could even be used to upgrade a from purgatory to heaven, even if they were already dead.<sup>6</sup>

We heard about Johann Tetzel earlier.

He was one of the ones that worked out that indulgences could be a good little earner.

He ran a very complex operation where he'd send a team of people in advance whose job it was to find out how much money everyone in town had.

He'd then turn up and preach with the aim of extracting as much money from people as possible.

Some of the money went to the archbishop (who'd had to pay a large bribe to the pope to get his job) and some of it went straight to the pope to pay for building St Peter's Basilica.

Tetzel was very good at his job of selling indulgences.

People lined up to hand over their hard earned to buy themselves and their loved ones out of trouble.

There was even a jingle going around saying,

*“Sobald der Pfennig im Kasten klingt, die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt”*

*“As soon as the coin into the box rings, a soul from purgatory to heaven springs!”<sup>7</sup>*

You could even buy indulgences in advance.

The story goes that Tetzel was selling indulgences in the city of Leipzig when a bloke came up to him, asking if he could buy an indulgence for a sin that he may commit in the future.

Tetzel agreed, but required that the bloke pay on the spot, which he did.

When Tetzel left town, the very same man attacked him and robbed him.

Apparently this was the very sin that he'd had in mind.

It was bad enough that Tetzel was wringing money out of people by using emotional blackmail.

What's worse is that he effectively taught that you could buy your own salvation.

Tetzel wasn't allowed into Wittenberg because he'd take business away from the Prince's relic collection.

However, many of the people in the local area went to other towns to see him.

Technically, you still had to be contrite and confess your sin, even with an indulgence.

However Luther got cross when people came back thinking that they didn't even need to be sorry because they'd bought an indulgence.

You might be thinking that the idea of being able to pay money to make right your sins is bizarre.

After all, we're saved by grace alone through faith alone.

Yet according to our law, in many cases you can pay a fine and avoid doing gaol time or community service.

If your car is registered in the name of a company and a speeding fine, you can nominate who was driving and they get issued with a fine and lose demerit points.

Or you pay a much larger fine and not have anyone take person responsibility for speeding.

It's not uncommon for people to think they can buy their way into God's good books.

Giving some money to the door-knocker as they come around or the person collecting in the shopping centre makes them a good person, doesn't it?

Shouldn't God be happy when they make a large donation to make themselves feel better after they've done something wrong.

The Bible teaches us that's not how it works – only Jesus has the power to save.

Luther thought this whole system was a dangerous joke.

The problem of indulgences is what Luther's 95 Theses were really about.

In Thesis 75, he writes:

*To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.*

This whole broken system undermines the work of Christ.

Penance, purgatory and indulgences all say that what Jesus did on the cross didn't pay the full penalty for sin.

Through Jesus, we are declared to have the righteousness of God.

We don't need anything else.

In Luther's own words:

*Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.<sup>8</sup>*

In the words of the Bible:

*2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV11) <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

We don't need indulgences because they're not enough.

It's not that Jesus paid a bit and we pay a bit.

Jesus took away all the debt we owe.

There is no more demand for us to pay.

*Colossians 2:13–14 (NIV11) <sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

In the gospel, we're completely freed from all the consequences of sin.

Paul tells us that there is no condemnation when we trust in Jesus, not something left over that needs to have satisfaction made for it.

*Romans 8:1–2 (NIV11) <sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

That's why we sing the hymn:

*Jesus paid it all;  
All to Him I owe.  
Sin had left a crimson stain –  
He washed it white as snow.*

To say anything more is required or even possible to make us right with God is to de-value what Jesus has done.

By adding the need for penance and then the system of indulgences to what Jesus has done, they effectively take away from Jesus.

The Reformers affirmed that Christ ALONE is enough for us to be saved.

Here's two more formulae, following on from last week.

Jesus + Nothing = Everything.

Jesus + Anything = Nothing.

If you add to Jesus, then you lose everything.

There are Roman Catholic scholars who argue that Johann Tetzel and his type were over-zealous, even though what he did was on behalf of the pope.

Yet the Roman Catholic Church continues to hand out indulgences today.

If you want an indulgence, has Pope Francis got the deal for you.

You do need to get on a plane and fly to Fatima, Portugal though.

And you'd better be quick because you've only got another week until the offer runs out.

The pope has been giving a plenary indulgence to anyone who travels to see the statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

You must also pray the Our Father, recite the Creed and invoke the Mother of God.

Unfortunately, if you can't fly there you've missed your opportunity because to "spiritually unite yourself to the jubilee celebrations" you could only get the indulgence on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May to October.<sup>9</sup>

That's also why the Roman Catholic Church also continue to make saints – they need to keep topping up the treasury.

In 2010, Pope Benedict made the Australian-born nun, Mary Helen MacKillop, a saint.

Like most significant people in the Roman Catholic Church, she was excommunicated out of the church at one point in her life, but she was made a saint because apparently two miracles happened when people prayed to her.

The church needs the saints' excess merit.

That's the problem of penance.

What the medieval church was teaching undercuts the very central truths of Christianity.

Christ alone, not the treasury of the church, is enough for us to be saved.

That's the gospel – the good news of Jesus.

It's hard to put it better than Thesis 62:

*The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.*

## The Melodrama of the Mass

Another one of the sacraments that undermines Christ by adding to what he's done is the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass.

We celebrated the Lord's Supper this morning.

We have lots of people lead us around the table – not just “the pastor”.

We had some ordinary bread and some ordinary grape juice – unfermented fruit of the vine.

These symbols are the ones that Jesus told us to use to remember and proclaim his death.

The Roman Catholic understanding of the Mass is quite different.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council settled the doctrine of transubstantiation.

In response to the reformers, the Council of Trent described transubstantiation as:

*“[T]hat wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood.”<sup>10</sup>*

Instead of just being symbols, Roman Catholic dogma says that in the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine changes.

It still looks like a wafer and wine though.

This change happens when the priest – or the “wizard” as I've less charitably heard him referred to as – says the magic words:

*God our Father, we now ask you to send your Holy Spirit to change these gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

In the Mass, the priest offers Christ as the sacrificial victim to God on behalf of the people.

The bread is called the host from the Latin *hostia*, which means 'victim'.

In that sacrifice, God's anger is turned away and forgiveness of sins is obtained.

The emphasis in the Mass is that Christ is really there – he's really present.

Roman Catholics sincerely believe this and take it very seriously.

People bow and curtsy to the altar because they believe that Jesus is really there.

They're encouraged to pray to the host that's left over and even just looking at it is powerful.

As a teenager, I remember reading a letter to the editor in the local rag in which a well-meaning Catholic lady in the district said to the effect that scientific testing has proved that this actually happens.<sup>11</sup>

It's often said that Roman Catholics are sacrificing Jesus over and over again.

It's a fine distinction, but a good Roman Catholic will say that's not the case.

Even in the 1500s, they were very quick to argue that they are not repeating the sacrifice at Calvary, but are 'renewing' it or 'making present'.<sup>12</sup>

They would say they are performing the same sacrifice as the cross and making that real because human beings need to weekly experience the presence of Christ.

Even still, this whole act is profoundly disrespectful to Jesus.

The Mass itself insists that Jesus' sacrifice isn't finished, it's not completed.

In effect, the mass says that his death once on that hill outside Jerusalem was enough.

Yet on the Cross, Jesus cried, "It is finished".

It also ignores that fact that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

The writer to the Hebrews makes the case in chapter 9 that Jesus doesn't have to appear again and again – his one act was enough.

Jesus appeared once – he doesn't need to appear weekly.

*Hebrews 9:27–28 (NIV11)* <sup>27</sup> Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he

*will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

Then again in chapter 10:

*Hebrews 10:12–14 (NIV11) <sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

Not only does this theology formulated in the medieval period insist that Jesus' sacrifice needs to continue on to be effective, they also add to what he's done by saying that you need to go through the priest.

A priest is required to do the work of the mass.

There can't be transubstantiation and sins can't be forgiven without a priest.

Do you know why Roman Catholic priests are called "Father"?

It's because they're the ones who bring life to the sons of the church.

In the New Testament, the leaders in the church are called pastors, elders, overseers, shepherds, not 'priest'.

There's only one person who stands between us and God.

Christ ALONE.

*1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV11) <sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,*

By adding priests, they take away from Jesus, our great high priest.

Saying that you need to go through anyone else undermines Christ and makes out that his work is inadequate.

Christ alone, not Christ plus the priest in the mass is what we need.

Most people today don't think they need a priest to get to God.

Yet we live in a world where people think that there are many ways to God.

What's so special about Jesus?

Don't all religions teach pretty much the same thing – that we need to be 'good people'?

No, they don't.

The Bible teaches us that we can never meet God's perfect standard.

We need a saviour.

And there's only one saviour who can bring you back to God: Jesus Christ.

There's only one person who lived the perfect life to be the perfect sacrifice.

*John 14:6 (NIV11) <sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

We must place our trust in Christ ALONE.

Not Christ being sacrificed in the Mass.

Not Christ plus the work of the priest.

## Conclusion

Most people here probably don't think they can buy their way to heaven.

Few of us think that we need to go through a priest.

Many of us in this room probably don't think there are multiple ways to God.

But we try to add to Jesus' work in much more subtle ways.

We all have other saviours that we look towards.

Some people look towards their spouse.

Others look to the future and their hope is the imaginary knight in shining armour who they're trusting to come along and make everything better.

Or we look to education – if I knuckle down and get a good education then I'll be able to get a good job and everything will be okay.

Still others look to their bank balance for the security that their money can provide them.

All of these things are temporary and they will disappoint you.

Don't even put your trust in yourself.

We'd all like to think that we can do it on our own, don't we?

If we just try something new, then we'll be able to be the kind of people that we make out we are on Instagram.

If we're honest about our experiences though, we can't get there on our own.

No preacher or counsellor will be able to prop you up.

Not John Macarthur, John Piper, Mark Driscoll, Don Carson, Philip Jensen, or whoever else it might be.

God-forbid... certainly not me.

We'll all let you down.

But I can point you towards the one who will never let you down.

Our testimony starts with Jesus, not ourselves.

Jesus, the Christ, is the only one that you is worthy of trusting with your life.

He's the only saviour that can satisfy all your wants and needs.

He's the saviour who's completely trustworthy, fully reliable.

The God who's already proven himself by dying and rising again.

Every spiritual blessing can be yours in Christ, if you place your trust in him.

Like the apostle Paul, might we be people who

*1 Corinthians 2:2 (NIV11) <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

Put your trust in Jesus and him alone.

---

<sup>1</sup> Baptism, confirmation, penance, the Eucharist, extreme unction, holy orders and matrimony. These were the final seven, although some medieval theologians argued for as many as 30.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Levering and Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Was the Reformation a Mistake?: Why Catholic Doctrine Is Not Unbiblical*, 2017, 154.

<sup>3</sup> It was officially defined at Lyons in 1274 and Florence in 1437.

<sup>4</sup> In 1342, Pope Clement VI in a bull named *Unigenitus*.

<sup>5</sup> This took a large amount of time and effort, including 5 day visit to Jerusalem in 1493.

<sup>6</sup> This was declared by Pope Sixtus IV in 1476 in a document called *Salvator noster*.

<sup>7</sup> This jingles is referred to in Luther's 27<sup>th</sup> Thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Thesis 36

<sup>9</sup> Maria Ximena Rondon, 'Three Ways to Obtain an Indulgence for the 100-Year Fatima Anniversary', Catholic News Agency, accessed 16 November 2017, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/three-ways-to-obtain-an-indulgence-for-the-100-year-fatima-anniversary-78258/>.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Trent, Session XIII, Canon II

<sup>11</sup> Which goes to show that this lady didn't really understand the foundation of transubstantiation in Aristotle's idea of accident and substance.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Trent, Session XXII

# Christ ALONE

Topical

19 November 2017 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Idea:** Christ ALONE is sufficient to save us.

**Big Question:** Do I need anything more than faith in Jesus to be right with God?

## Discussion Questions

1. How do you think you would've responded to Johann Tetzel preaching about indulgences?
2. What is an indulgence and why did people want them?
3. Why was Martin Luther so upset by this practice?
4. Is the problem with indulgences just the abuse of people like Tetzel?
5. How is the Roman Catholic Mass different for the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper?
6. How does the Mass take away from what Jesus has done?
7. How would you answer a friend who believes that all religions are equally valid as the way to get to God?
8. As Christians, what saviours do we functionally add to Jesus?