

The date was March the 20th, 2022. 55,000 people had gathered at the MCG, a champion, a hero of Australian culture. The cricketering great Shane Warne had died before his time in his early 50s, and there was a huge state funeral to celebrate his life.

Shane Warne, or Warne, was a champion. He was the second highest ever test cricket wicket taker as a bowler, and many who know cricket would call him a legend.

And like any champion, time and time again, the Australian cricket team would get in a situation where they couldn't get the opposition out, and the captain would regularly go to Shane Warne, the guy that stepped up when the challenge was at its

highest, and he'd take the ball, and somehow he would pull out of a bag a ball that was marvellous, that was incredible and get a wicket and everything would change. Champions are like that, aren't they? They step up when needed.

And sometimes champions actually give their life in sacrifice for the team. Well, today we're going to talk about Humanity's champion. We've been singing about him.

Not a country's sporting hero or political reformer. Today, we are talking about the one and only Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world and why it is good and right to call him Lord. Today's message is entitled God's Rescue Plan.

God's Rescue Plan. As you know, there's a book. We've been giving it away for free for the last month.

Hopefully, you've been able to pick it up. If not, even right now, please feel free to go on your phone and find that book and download it, so you could have a look at it while we go through the course.

I'm hoping that people might remember to bring their books, bring a pen and take some notes, because this is all for us to be better equipped, so that we could go through the course with someone else, one-on-one or in a small group.

Last week, we began with sunsets over Fremantle Beach and a watch in the sand. We talked about the design argument. And we asked this question, is there a God?

And if God exists, what's He like? Does He expect anything from us if He made us? Can we believe the Bible?

And we ended up with a sum up question that, in not particularly concise English, might look like this.

Could there be a good God who is creator of everything, who has made an extraordinarily beautiful world, and yet this world is profoundly broken through the destructive execution of free will, causing great suffering?

There is a good God, the Bible teaches, and He made everything, and yet sin has caused an enormous problem that needs to be fixed.

I say the word sin because I've been a Christian for many years, and I'm a pastor, and it's jargon that I'm very familiar with. But I appreciate that to say the word sin is somewhat jarring for maybe some of you.

The word sin is what we might call a roadblock to faith. It sounds judgmental, maybe. It sounds medieval, it sounds religious, it sounds outdated, sin.

For some of us, we might think, I know there are bad people, but I'm not one of them. So when you talk about sin, I'm trying to think who you might be referring to because it's someone other than me. For other people, I think it's fair enough.

You think, well, no one has the right to tell me what's right and wrong. So where does the idea of sin actually come from?

I would put it to you that sin is a very important concept for us to get our heads around because without an appreciation of sin, we don't appreciate a saviour. Is that fair to say? You don't have a need for a saviour if there's not a problem.

And can I commend to you this organisation? They're called Bible Project. We support them, have for many years.

If you were to look with your phone at that QR code, that will take you to one of the most concise five minute definitions on video of sin you'll ever find. So, if you want to, just be careful, you don't press it and it'll kick off your video.

But that's somewhere that's worth checking out. And that's what we're doing in this course. It's a little bit different to a sermon series that's a typical sermon series.

We're trying to really let you know some good resources that are out there. Sin. Jesus taught that murder was sin.

In his great Sermon on the Mount, Chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. He said, murder is sin. And I think we would all agree.

It's a terrible thing to take away someone's life. Life is so wonderful and it breaks the sanctity of life and our respect for other human beings. But what's interesting is he says anger also can be sin.

So, murder, yeah. But what about anger? Anger is not always sin, but it can be sin.

And what Jesus is getting at in this great sermon on the Mount is that God looks at what happens in our heart, inside of us, in our mind. It's not just what happens for others to see. And so we talked about adultery.

And I think most of us would go, yeah, adultery, if something's bad. Cheating on your spouse, that's got to be bad. Maybe that's sin.

He said, Jesus taught that when you lust after someone in your heart, you're committing adultery. So can you see how he raises the bar? Jesus is like, sin is deeper than you might think.

So if you think you're just not a sinner, have another think about, maybe do an inventory on your life, and you might find, yeah, maybe I am a sinner after all. Sin involves things we do, things we think and things we fail to do.

Things we fail to do, sins of omission. So, yeah, it's hard to run the gauntlet of righteousness as a human being and come out the other end and say, I think I'm sinless. We are sinners.

God has created us in His image. This is a wonderful truth the Bible teaches.

We bear His image and because we are of infinite worth in His image as human beings, God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel to teach these humans how to live in such a way that would honor Him and reflect who He is and what He's like.

There's five commandments in the Ten Commandments that are about us and God, and five that are about us and other people. Now, I think that shows us that sin is a breaking of any of those commands.

We miss the target and the question is, is there a consequence for missing the target, the goal of how we're meant to live to be image bearers of God Himself? Yes, Romans 6 in the New Testament says, the wages of sin is death.

The wages of sin is death. There's a problem biblically that we have as human beings. Sin separates us from God and it will do that eternally.

It will lead us to death and not life. Enter the stage of history, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus made some startling claims about himself on page 37.

If you have your book, you might like to turn to that and just check out some of these quotes from scripture. John 14, 6, Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And later on, the disciples who follow Jesus wrote, Salvation is found in no one else, Acts 4, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

So the Bible teaches that salvation, God's solution to the problem of sin, salvation to be forgiven and given a fresh start and restored to relationship with God, salvation is found in no one else other than Jesus. Jesus is the exclusive path to God.

He said again, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to God except through me. So, let's be courageous and let's talk about the elephant in the room.

Have you seen an elephant in a room? The elephant in the room is this next question. Jesus seems like a good guy, but is, wait a minute, is he actually suggesting that there's no other truth that will get you to eternal life than him?

He surely is not saying that. What do you think? That is what he is saying.

He is making an exclusive claim to truth. One way, not many, he is saying all roads don't lead to God. Only one does.

We deal with some of the issues that arise about this exclusive, a claim of exclusivity on page 39 of the book. One interesting and helpful idea was raised by CS. Lewis, where he talks about liar, lunatic, Lord.

And he says, you know, Jesus is a compelling and challenging figure. He said some full on things, right? You've got to follow me.

Now, if he is telling them something that he knows is not true, he claimed to be the son of God. He's a fiendish character, isn't he? He's lying to them because some of them lost their life to follow him.

But when you think about it, CS. Lewis is like, does he look like, does he seem like a liar? Well, no.

History has looked at him as the most amazing, godly man of character. So it's unlikely that Jesus is a teacher, is a liar.

And then the question is, well, if he didn't know that he was telling them falsehoods, maybe he's a lunatic, maybe he's self-deceived. But Lewis argues, Jesus, again, he's regarded as one of the great moral teachers.

Is it likely that he was a lunatic? It's not. So you have liar and lunatic that you might exclude.

And then he argues, you're left with the idea that maybe he's the Lord. There's nowhere else to go. He claims he's the son of God.

He claims that people have to believe in him to live forever and find a relationship back with God again to solve the problem of sin. He's either a liar, a lunatic, or he is the Lord. Exclusivity.

Can there be one way to God? One way that is wholly right. Page 39 and 40, we talk about a story about an elephant.

We're talking about the elephant in the room. Do you know the story of the blind men? The three blind men who are feeling the elephant.

And people say, oh, if you want to understand the truth of the universe, if you want to understand how religions relate to God, this is it. Like this is the answer. This is the analogy, the parable.

And so people will say, so there's a blind man and he says that God is long and sharp. And he's describing a tusk. And he represents one sort of religion.

And another blind man says the truth is large and flappy. It's like a tarpaulin. He's describing what?

The elephant's ear. The third man says the truth about God is long, a bit like a python. He's describing the elephant's trunk.

And the supposedly wise person says, you can see that the blind men are all feeling the same God. Isn't that wonderful? They're all just feeling the same God.

They just don't know they're feeling the same God. And what is the problem, the profoundly ironic problem with that statement against exclusivity of truth? That person, they're the only one without a blindfold on.

They're saying, I'm telling you exclusive POV truth, point of view, I'm watching them all, and they're all touching the same God. That's so arrogant, it's not funny. If you also think all is one and all roads lead to God, are you with me?

Anybody with me? It's a very powerful parable to flip on its head and show that story does not say exclusivity of truth is out of the question. It argues for it.

It argues for it. Truth can be and is exclusive, and that's okay. 2 plus 2 equals 4, which excludes 2 plus 2 equals 5.

Just think about it logically. Jesus Christ rose again from the grave. That excludes Jesus Christ died and stayed in the grave, doesn't it?

It's not the worst thing to have exclusive truth, but the wonderful thing about the Christian gospel is it's an exclusive claim to truth that is so beautifully inclusive. Amen. It's an inclusive claim that is exclusive.

It's come all who are weary and burdened. Jesus has made a way for you to find hope again and freedom from sin and a relationship with God that will never end.

Can I read out three important scriptures for you about Jesus, the champion? Luke 1 verse 30, But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the son of the most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end.

Then in Luke 7. So he replied to the messengers, go back and report to John what you have seen and heard.

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. First Corinthians 15.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

These verses tell us in a summary form, that Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, called the Son of God.

He grew into a man and Luke 7 says, he did the most extraordinary things, blind receive sight, lame people walked, deaf were healed and could hear, the poor were seen and encouraged, and he went on to die for the sins of the world, buried and then

rose again from the grave three days later. That's a lot to take in, isn't it? You can read about it on page 32. Page 32.

His life, death and resurrection. The story of the greatest champion humanity has ever seen. Jesus is an intriguing character.

I've often heard it said that the best thing about Christianity is what? Jesus. There's a lot about Christianity that we're not that proud of.

Isn't that true? There's a lot of hypocrisy. There's a lot of nastiness.

There's a lot of bullying. There's a lot of power games. But you'll often hear people say, but Jesus.

One of my best mates who walked away from the faith, he said, Jesus still is compelling, but the church isn't. And often people feel that Jesus, he is incredible, isn't he? He touched lepers.

Sometimes you think, what's God like? Well, the biblical idea is God is like Jesus. What's God like?

It's like Jesus. No one else can touch or will touch a leper, but Jesus did. That's what God's like.

Jesus healed all sorts of types of people. He loved ethnic outcasts, spoke with a brand of truth that was astonishing to the intelligentsia of the day. The smart and educated were baffled.

He spoke to a storm, and he still did like it. It's funny, isn't it, the emotion gets you. He still did like a dog owner controlling an unruly dog.

He spoke to the grave and asked a man to come out after four days, and he walked out. And he's still changing lives today. And he does it.

He directs with a precision of truth that's customized for each of us, which is special and wonderful. Jesus, is he the champion of humanity? He's certainly enigmatic, charismatic, and yet the servant who suffered.

Your question might be, well, this is quite moving. In fact, it's hard to not be moved when someone gets a bit emotional. But maybe your question is like, I'm not ready to get emotionally drawn in yet.

How do I know that he even lived this Jesus? Well, page 34 in your book gives some historical proofs of Jesus' existence. Roman sources like Tacitus, it's real.

AD 110 wrote, Christus suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius. It's not something that's made up. This is historical.

Jewish sources, so they're not Christian, Jewish. They don't believe he's the Messiah, but Josephus in 93 AD says, Jesus was a teacher and a miracle worker who was crucified. Ancient documents agree, he was a real man who lived, taught, and died.

The Jewish prophecies are really also, in the Old Testament, genuinely fascinating. Before he was born, prophets spoke about the one who would come, who would be God's champion. He would be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem.

This is hard stuff to fake, isn't it? When you end up thinking, I think I'm the Messiah. Was I born of a virgin?

Was I born in Bethlehem? Yeah. From the line of David, he would perform miracles.

He would be rejected and killed. He would rise again from the grave. The Bible teaches that God's champion remained sinless.

Warny could bowl a good leg break, but he had some problems. He wasn't sinless like any of us. We're all sinners.

But Jesus Christ was perfect. 1 Peter 2, He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. So you have this man who is without sin, but he has a job to go and die on a cross in our place.

And so scripture says he went, was convicted in a mock trial, and under an unjust charge of treason against the emperor, he was executed on a cross. Do you feel like you're a sinner? Do you feel like you need a saviour?

Is there anything in your heart, inside, in your soul that says, I haven't lived up to my own standard, let alone God's? That's the problem, this problem of sin.

The Old Testament prophesied in Isaiah, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. It sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

That was written 700 years before Jesus. The prophecy pointing towards what Christ would do. 1 Peter says, 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.

The Christian gospel says there's a divine exchange. Jesus died on the cross perfect, he died on the cross and took our punishment, and the divine exchange is, by faith in him, we get what he deserved, which is a right relationship with God.

This is what is so important about the cross. Someone had to pay for sin. And the bible says that God did in his son by dying on a cross.

Page 44, we survey what some of the other religions say about God's suffering and dying in our place. They don't say anything about a God who would suffer in our place in Islam. With all due respect, Allah is transcendent to suffer.

God sends prophets, not himself. In Hinduism, the gods appear in many forms, but they do not die for sin. In Buddhism, there is no personal God at all.

Enlightenment comes through detachment, not sacrifice or, not relationship or sacrifice. Again, we're talking about this because of the exclusive claim. And some who would say all roads lead to God.

But they don't. They're completely different. In New Age thinking, you are divine.

There's no need for atonement, only self-discovery. Only Jesus, the son of God, enters our world, suffers in our place and dies for sinners. Christians sometimes say words like hallelujah.

It comes out of us without thinking. Praise God. Is that true?

Could that be true, that our God died for us? Yes, it's true. And the reason it had to happen is you imagine, I don't think anyone wants a universe that has no justice.

Like I've never spoken to someone who says, I really love the idea that the universe doesn't impose justice. I love the idea that bullies always get away with doing crimes.

Everyone I've ever spoken to says, if we get to choose, could we have a just universe? Could we have a morally sound, organised, judged universe? Well, that's the biblical view.

God knows he has to punish sin because he has set up a just, holy universe, but he's merciful and compassionate and slow to anger and loving. And so he has this dilemma, justice, mercy, justice, mercy, justice, mercy. Can you see why Jesus fits that?

Jesus comes and takes the punishment in our place, and justice and mercy are met together.

The real hero, the real hero of humanity, the champion of our cause is the one who died in our place, but death couldn't hold him down. And this is what we're seeing about the resurrection.

This is the linchpin of Christianity, that the one who died on a cross didn't stay dead. Death couldn't hold him down. The disciples came back to check the grave, and the stone was rolled away.

It was guarded by Roman soldiers, but it was rolled away. On page 49, we're sort of coming in to land this intense message that's covering a lot of ground. Page 49, we have proofs of the resurrection in your book.

And very quickly, four historical facts nearly all scholars agree on. Number one, Jesus was crucified and died. That happened.

The tomb was found empty. The women were the first to testify. Women couldn't give a testimony in the court of law.

So it's just bizarre and wonderful that the first eye witnesses of the empty tomb were people that couldn't validly give a testimony. The women, but it's so lovely the way God shows He loves men and women. He uses them both.

Many people claim to see Jesus. There was a group of more than 500 that saw him, and then the disciples were transformed. They were scaredy cats beforehand, and they went off and basically all lost their lives.

So people say, was it hallucinations? Just seeing a spirit form, not for 500 people. Was it a stolen body?

Who would steal the body? The disciples, they were hiding in fear. How would they do it?

They were guarded by Roman soldiers. Some say it's the wrong tomb. They didn't know which tomb it was.

Everyone, including the authorities, would have known the location of the tomb. What's the best explanation, like Pat said? What is the best explanation?

It is that Jesus died and rose again. The Bible actually says, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. So if you want to pull Christianity completely apart, just prove that Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

It would have been easier to do it a few years after it happened, but it hasn't happened. No one's been able to prove it. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, and therefore everything is different. Not just in a historical way, in a personal way. He has given, 1 Peter, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is well attested by ancient sources, believed on by the early witnesses, never refuted by Jesus' enemies, and transformative in history and today.

So what are you going to do with Jesus of Nazareth? What are you going to do with him? He's compelling.

But I would also say he's essential. You have to decide. Pat said that he had a radical transformation from atheism to agnosticism.

And that's maybe where you are. Even after today, maybe you say, well, I used to not believe and now I don't know what I believe. And you know what?

That's okay. It's a journey that we are on. My mate used to say, a great prayer to pray is, God, are you there and do you care?

Pray it, try it. God, are you there? And if you are, do you care?

It sounds obvious to say, but warning, even though the crowds do these ones, he's not worthy of worship, and I don't think he actually believed that at all.

But if Jesus is who he said he is, if he did what the Bible said he did, he's worthy of worship. He's lived the life that we could not live, he's died the death that we had to die, he has risen from the grave to open the door to eternal life.

And he is worthy of our best, of our faith. The preacher often closes his eyes at the end, and that means he's about to pray. So why don't we bow our heads?

Lord God, we thank You that You've given us brains that have such capacity to hear a lot of words and to process them. But again, Lord, I know, it's our hearts that You need and You want. And so I pray You'd speak through all the words.

You'd just speak the truth of the good news to hearts today. Draw them to You. Convince them that You are real, You are there and You do care.

And I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.