

Christ or Muhammad

THE PATH TO PARADISE

Christ or Muhammad?

Death is in the news. More than usual, that is. The thousands who died in the USA on September 11, the continuing violence in Northern Ireland and the threatening clouds of war - these realities are concentrating the minds of most of us just now. Indeed, everyone is forced to face the inevitable fact of their death, including those who prefer an alcohol and drug-driven dream-world of denial.

Even in secular western civilisation, religion of some sort flourishes because of death. The need of some kind of 'insurance' is sometimes felt even by the most godless. "We'd better be ready for God - just in case." Sadly, they are too easily satisfied by a touch of ritual and a dose of nominalism.

Needless to say, the reality of death as a consequence of sin highlights the nature and necessity of the Christian Gospel (see Romans 5: 12-21). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Christian solution to sin and death:

'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, [Christ] himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (Hebrews 2: 14-15).

Thus the only real relief from all the bad news is the good news of Christ:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3: 16).

He alone is the answer to a despairing, dying and doomed world:

'Jesus said..., "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." '(John 14: 6).

'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4: 12).

For those who just shrug their shoulders and say, "So what?", hear the words of John the Baptist:

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' (John 3: 36).

But if this remains the unambiguous and assured faith of all Bible-believing Christians, Muslims and others say differently. We are told that Muhammad and other religious leaders provide us with equally-certain paths to paradise.

The terrible events of September 11 have brought the character and claims of Islam into sharp focus. Indeed, the five-page Arabic document discovered by the FBI in the luggage of the suspected terrorist Mohamed Atta demands our attention.

First, this document silences the assertions of those who deny that Islam provided any religious motivation for the attacks on New York and Washington. Besides giving instructions about clothes, knives, wills, IDs and passports, the document gave the suicide bombers the following instructions:

'In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most compassionate...Remember the battle of the Prophet...against the infidels, as he went on building the Islamic state...Continue to recite the Qur'an...You have to be

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convinced that those few hours that are left in your life are very few. From there you will begin to live the happy life, the infinite paradise... Be optimistic. The Prophet [Muhammad] was always optimistic. Always remember the verses that you would wish for death before you meet it if you only know what the reward after death will be... You will be entering paradise. You will be entering the happiest life, everlasting life.'

So we must ask, "Did the Qur'an actually supply the terrorists with the incentives they needed?" The answer could not be clearer:

'Fight for the cause of Allah' (Sura 2: 244).

'Those that deny Our revelations [says Allah] we will burn in Hellfire... As for those that have faith and do good works, we shall admit them to gardens watered by running streams, where, wedded to chaste virgins, they shall abide for ever... the believers who do good works, whether men or women, shall enter the gardens of Paradise' (Sura 4: 55-7, 124).

'The true believers fight for the cause of Allah... Fight then against the friends of Satan... Therefore fight for the cause of Allah' (Sura 4: 76, 84).

'Allah has given those that fight with their goods and their persons a higher rank than those who stay at home. He has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him...' (Sura 4: 96).

'When the sacred months are over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them...' (Sura 9: 5).

'...make war on the leaders of unbelief...' (Sura 9: 12).

'Proclaim a woeful punishment to those that hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's cause. The day will surely come when their treasures shall be heated in the fire of Hell,...' (Sura 9: 35).

'Believers, why is it that when it is said to you: 'March in the cause of Allah,' you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come? Few indeed are the blessings of this life, compared to those of the life to come. If you do not fight He will punish you sternly and replace you by other men...' (Sura 9: 38-9).

'Whether unarmed or well-equipped, march on and fight for the cause of Allah, with your wealth and your persons' (Sura 9: 41).

'Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate' (Sura 9: 73).

'Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you...' (Sura 9: 122).

Who then can deny the Qur'anic factor in the recent tragic terror?

Second, while the Qur'an gives such exhortations and encouragements to those who fight in Allah's cause, just how sure were Mohamed Atta and his fellow terrorists of reaching paradise? To aid them, the five-page document provided the following prayers:

'In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate... I pray to you Allah to forgive me from all my sins, to allow me to glorify you in every possible way... Oh Allah, open all doors for me. Oh Allah who answers prayers and answers those who ask you, I am asking you for your help. I am asking you for forgiveness. I am asking you to lighten my way. I am asking you to lift the burden I feel... Allah, I trust in you. Allah, I lay myself in your hands... I ask [you] with the light of your faith that has lit the whole world and lightened all darkness on this earth, to guide me

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until you approve of me. And once you do, that's my ultimate goal...That is no God but Allah, I being a sinner. We are of Allah, and to Allah we return.'

The most pressing question is obvious. Did Mohamed Atta and his terrorist friends wake up in paradise? If so, they must be the first cases of unrepentant killers to be welcomed there. Indeed, these men were murderers not martyrs! Were they forgiven? How could they be? Yes, according to the Christian gospel, penitent murderers besides those guilty of sexual and other wickedness may be saved (see Psalm 51: 14; Luke 23: 19, 42-3; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11). However, it is impossible to be a penitent murderer while pursuing the deed of murder. No, Mohamed Atta and his fellow murderers died utterly deceived. They had a rude awakening on the 'other side'! The Book of Revelation describes their terrible destiny:

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' (Revelation 21: 8).

Of course, as this verse indicates, these Islamic terrorists will not be alone. They will be 'shoulder to shoulder' with murdering, materialistic and immoral Americans, Brits and others as well as their non-violent fellow Muslims. Indeed, terrorism is not 'the only evil in the world'. Terrorists do not have a monopoly on evil. Pleasure-seeking, sin-loving, Bible-scoffing, Christ-blaspheming westerners are just as likely candidates for hell as the Muslim murderers of September 11, 2001. And why? Because if they die without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, there is no hope! For those who take the true message of Christianity seriously, there is simply no other conclusion.

Christ's solemn account of the rich man and Lazarus sheds much light on all this (see Luke 16: 19-31). Well might the rich man's words be the words of Mohamed Atta and his associates:

'I beg you therefore, father [Abraham], that you would send [someone] to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'

Of course, the Islamic document read by the terrorists does at least recognise the reality of sin and the need of forgiveness. However, their only hope is a religion based on works-righteousness. But did their terror even begin to qualify? Could their murderous madness possibly merit the mercy of God? Since Muslims deny that Christ was crucified (see Sura 4: 157), they cannot appeal to His atoning sacrifice for salvation. They argue that Christians have corrupt versions of the Bible and not the original account of Christ. But where is this uncorrupted original? If that was the word of God, would God have allowed it to be lost or destroyed?

Interestingly, in Christ's account of the rich man, 'father Abraham' says that his brothers may learn the message of salvation from 'Moses and the prophets'. In short, the Gospel of salvation is found in the Old Testament as well as in the New. There, Moses foretold the coming of 'a prophet' (see Deuteronomy 18: 15; Acts 7: 37). This was Christ and not Muhammad! And why? Muhammad never performed the amazing deeds prophesied of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah described the person and sacrificial sufferings of this 'prophet, priest and king':

'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7: 14).

'For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called wonderful,

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Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9: 6).

'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53: 4-6).

The fact is that we all need a mediator. Because we are all hell-deserving sinners, it is impossible to appear 'naked' before God and live. We need 'righteous apparel' and an advocate. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us His righteousness. He is the very mediator we need, as Paul reminds us:

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2: 5).

This was the comfort of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Facing a violent death at the hands of cruel persecutors, he was granted a sight of Christ his mediator:

'But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"...And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" ' (Acts 7: 55-9).

Thus the message of the Gospel is clear. There is no other!

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3: 16).

So (as the Muslim document stated), burdened by our sins, and needing God's approval in order to avoid hell, the message of His grace is the answer we need. For the sake of Christ who suffered 'the just for the unjust' (1 Peter 3: 18), penitent and trusting sinners gain God's acceptance by the free pardon of their sins. When we trust in Christ, we receive the Father's approval because we approve of His Son. Thus the merit of Christ's sacrifice is imputed to us (or placed to our account) just as our guilt was imputed to Him (see 2 Corinthians 5: 19-21). Only by honouring the Son do we honour the Father (see John 5: 23).

So rejecting Christ indicates a rejection of God. There is no other Gospel despite the treacherous denials of multi-faith liberals and other apostate deceivers. We cannot save ourselves. Salvation is about 'receiving' not 'achieving'. Thank God! Salvation is available to anyone who repents of sin and turns to Christ:

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1: 9).

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast' (Ephesians 2: 8-9).

'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5: 1).

'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11: 28).

If you trust in Christ, he will not only forgive you. He will begin to change you by His Spirit. You will live a life of good works, the fruit of the root of true saving faith (see Ephesians 2: 10). You will be kind and merciful to others. Your religious life will not be driven by hate and resentment. You will not seek to propagate the Christian Faith by

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violence, cruelty, bitterness and death (see Matthew 5: 43-5; 26: 52; Romans 13: 10; 2 Corinthians 10: 4-5; Ephesians 6: 12). You will not shame Christ and disfigure the Gospel like medieval crusading Catholics or Roman Catholic and Protestant paramilitary thugs in Northern Ireland. As a sinner greatly forgiven, you will breathe love and forgiveness towards those who wrong you. Like Stephen, you will pray, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7: 60).

So, in the face of death, whether peaceful or violent, expected or sudden, by sickness or accident, what is the path to paradise? The New Testament points the way:

'Then [the penitent criminal] said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."' (Luke 23: 42-3)

This is the truth we all need to hear. This is the way to the true paradise of God which, unlike the fleshly, lustful paradise of Islam, is a realm and state of perfect holiness and happiness.

Reader, believe the pure truth of God! Trust in our Lord Jesus Christ! Depend on His once-for-all sacrifice for sin. Live a life of faith, love and holiness. Love God and your fellow human beings. When the time comes, a place in paradise awaits you.

What tragically cannot be said of Mohamed Atta and his associates or anyone who rejects Christ, may be sung of all who live and die in Jesus:

Rejoice for all Christians deceased,
Our loss is their infinite gain;
Their souls out of prison released,
Are freed from their bodily chains;
With songs let us follow their flight,
And mount with their spirits above,
Escaped to the mansions of light,
And lodged in the Eden of love.

(Charles Wesley, alt.)

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