

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Module 2: The Life of Jesus

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Part 9 – The Silence is Broken

Key Questions:

- How does the New Testament follow on from the Old Testament? Who is Jesus?

Summary of the Old Testament

One way to describe the theme of the Bible is through the idea of the Kingdom of God, which we have defined as:

God's people living in God's place under God's rule enjoying God's blessings

In the Old Testament we see this theme working through the events of human history:

1. God's Kingdom established – Creation

God created mankind to rule over the earth, but in obedience to God's command (under His rule).

2. God's kingdom rejected – Sin

Mankind disobeyed God (rejected His rule). The result was separation from God's presence and death.

3. God's kingdom pre-figured – the Old Covenant

God made a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, in three stages:

(i) Abraham was given the sign of circumcision and three promises:

- The land of Canaan would belong to his descendants
- He would have many descendants who would become a great nation
- All nations would be blessed through his descendants

(ii) Moses was given the Law of God

The Law showed the people how they should live, how they should worship God through sacrifice and, most importantly, that they needed God's forgiveness for their sin.

(iii) David was given an additional promise that his descendants would be kings forever.

However, the problem of sin meant that the people were not able to keep God's Laws or to be faithful to His covenant with them. The prophets looked forward to a coming Messiah who would restore God's Kingdom, and even to a New Covenant under which sin would finally be dealt with (see Jeremiah Chapter 31).

The silence is broken

Four books (called "Gospels") record the life and words of Jesus (see *Module 2 Study Aids* for a comparison of these books). The openings of the four Gospels were intended to emphasise that God was speaking again after 400 years of silence, and that the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah were about to be fulfilled:

Book and writer	Opening	Intention in writing
Matthew – one of Jesus' closest followers (an eyewitness to Jesus' life)	A list of Jesus' ancestors in three parts (Abraham to David, David to Exile, Exile to Jesus). Also tells about the visit of the Magi to see the new King (2:6).	To show that Jesus was the true King of Israel descended from King David
Mark – based his record on the account of Peter (an eyewitness to Jesus' life)	A quotation from Isaiah about the "messenger" who would come before the Messiah, which Mark links to John the Baptist	To show that Jesus was the Suffering Servant
Luke – a physician who interviewed several eyewitnesses to Jesus' life	A series of four stories before Jesus' birth putting his birth in the context of history and the Old Testament (<i>see below</i>)	To show that Jesus was a perfect sinless man
John – one of Jesus' closest followers (an eyewitness to Jesus' life)	An explanation that Jesus is the "Word" who was God and was with God and who came into the world to reveal God to us	To show that Jesus was the Son of God come into the world as a human being

The perfect time for Jesus to be born (Luke 2:1-2)

Luke records many historical details. He tells us that Jesus was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus (the Roman Emperor) when Quirinius was the governor of the Roman province of Syria. During Jesus' lifetime, Palestine was under Roman domination, although some parts had rulers from Herod's family who were under Roman authority. The Jewish people were hoping that God's Messiah who had been promised in the Old Testament would soon come to drive out the Romans and set up a new kingdom based in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders had particular expectations of what the Messiah should be like. They expected a Conquering King who would defeat the Romans, judge all the non-Jewish nations and set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem. They did not expect the Messiah to come as a Suffering Servant. The historical context meant that Jesus was born at the perfect time for the Christian message to spread across the world:

- **The Roman Empire** – since 31 BC there had been relative peace under Caesar Augustus after many decades of war
- **The Greek language** – the influence of the Greek world before the Roman Empire meant that one language, Greek, was spoken across the Roman Empire, including Europe and the Middle East. The New Testament was written in Greek.
- **The situation in Palestine** – the Jews were in Palestine and many expected the Messiah to come, although they had wrong ideas about what he would be like. Jesus could travel and teach freely, and the Temple still existed, providing a place where He could speak to many people at the regular Jewish festivals (the Temple was destroyed in AD 70).

God prepares the way for Jesus' Birth – Luke Chapters 1-2

These four stories form a link between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus, preparing us to understand who He is:

Story 1 – The priest Zechariah meets an angel in the Temple (Luke 1:5-25)

Location: The Temple in Jerusalem (the centre of Jewish worship, where sacrifices were made to God)

Key character: Zechariah, a priest. The priests came from the tribe of Levi, and were the only people who could offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people (under God's Law given to Moses).

Promise: That John will bring many people back to God, and will prepare the way for the Lord (verses 14-17). This is a clear reference to Old Testament prophecies about a forerunner to the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:3-8). John would be a very great prophet just like the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

Lesson: The Old Covenant failed because of sin and a lack of faith in God's people

Zechariah kept the Old Testament Law (verse 6), but he did not have real faith in God (this was the reason why he was made dumb – verse 20). We are reminded that many of the Jewish leaders at the time when Jesus was born had kept the outward practices of the Law (the Temple, sacrifices etc.), but did not have real faith in God. The Jews at the time of Jesus' birth tended to think that God would accept them just because they did the things the Law told them to do. They focussed on external appearances and were happy to be seen to do the right things. God is teaching us that what He really cares about most is the person's heart, and whether or not they have faith in Him! John's message will call the people to come back to a real trust in God.

Story 2 – Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel in Nazareth (Luke 1:26-38)

Location: Nazareth, a town in the region of Galilee (in the north of Palestine)

Key character: Mary, a virgin engaged to Joseph a descendant of David

Promise: Mary will call her son Jesus, and He will be called the Son of the Most High and will rule on David's throne forever (verses 31-35). The term the "*Son of God*" (Most High is another word for God) was a unique title used for Jesus.

Lesson: Jesus will be sinless, born of a virgin to be a King and Saviour

Jesus will be the King who reigns on David's throne, born to a virgin (as prophesied by Isaiah – see Isaiah 7:14). The miracle of the virgin birth is important to Christians as it is another unique truth about Jesus. It emphasises that He was not simply a human being, but also God living in a human body. Jesus was completely without sin and his birth was the beginning of a new kind of human being (a new creation). Everyone who follows him becomes part of this new humanity.

Story 3 – Mary visits Elizabeth (1:39-56)

Location: Zechariah's home in a town in the hill country of Judea (in the south of Palestine)

Key characters: Mary and Elizabeth

Promise: God will continue His work in Mary's day just as He did in the past (verses 46-55).

Lesson: God uses an ordinary person to carry on His plan because of her faith in Him

John recognised Jesus even when they were both still in the womb. Mary recognised that God was at work in her life just as He had worked in Abraham's life – this baby will be the continuation of the Old Testament story of God's plans. Mary's attitude is quite different from Zechariah's. Although she is just an ordinary girl, she has greater faith than the priest! Elizabeth said that Mary would be blessed because she had believed what God said (verse 45). This is the best way to define **faith – to accept God's word as true and act in keeping with it**. Mary had faith that God was still as powerful in her day as He had been in the past, and that He had a plan for her life that He was willing and able to fulfil.

Story 4 – The birth of John & Zechariah's prophecy (1:57-80)

Location: Zechariah's home in a town in the hill country of Judea

Key characters: Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Promise: John will be a great prophet who will prepare the way for the Messiah (verses 68-79)

Lesson: Jesus will fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies like the sun rising in a dark world

John was given a name that broke with family tradition – his ancestry was not important for the role God had for Him. This is quite different from Jesus, whose ancestry as a descendant of David was vital to His ministry. Zechariah's prophecy recognised that God would fulfil the Old Testament prophecies and remember His covenant with the people of Israel. God was going to fulfil the promises of the Old Covenant in an amazing way through Jesus. Jesus would be like the light of the sun rising on a darkened world. He would reveal God to people who did not know Him.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament

The Old and New Testaments explain each other. The Old Testament provides the background to the New, helping us to understand what it means, whilst the New Testament fulfils the Old, making its meaning clear. At the centre of both Old and New Testaments is one person, Jesus. He fulfilled all that went before Him, and is the centre of all that comes after Him. The Old Covenant can be described as "pre-figuring" the Kingdom of God because it introduces us to important ideas that find their fulfilment in Jesus. Jesus came to fulfil all aspects of the Old Covenant because:

1. He was the descendant of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed
2. He lived a perfect life, never breaking the Law, and died to be the one sacrifice for sins forever
3. He was the descendant of David who came to be the true King of Israel and of all nations

The "New Testament" opens with the birth of Jesus, and tells the story of how Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant and brought in a new kind of relationship (the New Covenant) between God and people. The theme of the Kingdom of God continues in the teaching of Jesus. **Jesus claimed that He was the true King who had come to earth to declare that the Kingdom of God was present and to show people how to enter it (see Part 12).**

Key Lesson: The New Testament shows that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament

The first four books of the New Testament tell the story of Jesus' life and teaching. They show that He fulfilled the promises of the Old Covenant and came to restore the Kingdom of God.

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Part 10 – The birth of Jesus

Key Questions:

- Who is Jesus? How can Christians claim that Jesus was both a man and also God?

Luke's Perspective (Luke 2:1-52) – Jesus is born as a human baby

Luke's stories about the birth of Jesus are intended to teach us important lessons about who Jesus was and why He came:

The birth of Jesus (2:1-7)

Who is Jesus? The Messiah, the descendant of King David

- Joseph was a descendant of King David. This is vital for understanding the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. The promised Saviour for God's people must be a descendant of the line of King David.
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem, even though at this time Joseph was living in Nazareth in Galilee. The Old Testament had said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the home town of David (see Micah 5:2). The decree of Caesar Augustus came at just the right time to ensure the prophecy was fulfilled.
- Although Jesus was the descendant of a king, he was born in very poor circumstances and his first bed was a manger (an animal feeding trough). He would be a different kind of King, one who would serve His people.

Shepherds meet the angels and come to visit Jesus (2:8-20)

Who is Jesus? The Saviour for *all* people, Christ the Lord

- In first century Jewish culture, shepherds had a bad reputation. They were outside of normal society because they lived in the fields for long periods of time, and many people distrusted them, thinking that they were dishonest.
- The angel promised "good news" for all people. The fact that the message first came to shepherds was proof that the message was indeed for everyone. Jewish people would have been shocked to hear that God chose to tell the good news about the birth of the Messiah to such people of such low reputation first. The Saviour was born for **all** people: poor and rich, respectable and unrespectable. The Bible teaches that all people need a Saviour who can deliver them from their sins, and Jesus would later claim that He had come especially to reach the lost (Luke 19:10).
- The two titles that the angel used when speaking about Jesus are very important:
 - **Christ** = the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah". This word means anointed or chosen one, and is a title to describe the special messenger and Saviour from God promised in the Old Testament.
 - **The Lord** = ruler. In Jewish usage this was usually a name for God. Jewish people were very strict to worship only God. No human person would be called Lord. Jesus is more than just a man (this will be clearer in *Part 11*).

Jesus is presented at the Temple (2:21-40)

Who is Jesus? A light shining from God to all nations, but also one who would suffer

- Mary and Joseph were in the Temple in Jerusalem fulfilling two Old Testament laws: one that required mothers to be purified 40 days after giving birth (Leviticus 12:1-8) and another that required first born sons to be presented to God (Exodus 13:2, Numbers 18:15-16). They were faithful Jewish parents obeying God's Law.
- The recognition of Jesus by Simeon and Anna, two old people who were waiting for the Messiah, is a reminder that His coming fulfilled the promises given centuries before his birth and recorded in the Old Testament. The "consolation" of Israel (verse 25) is a term for the time when the Messiah would come and bring new hope to the nation.
- Simeon made two separate prophetic statements about Jesus, which give us insights into what we should expect to see in the life of Jesus:
 - a) *Jesus will bring salvation to people from all nations* (verses 29-32) – "Gentiles" means all non-Jewish nations. This is an important statement, as we realise that the good news about Jesus will be for people from every ethnic background. It will bring light (meaning knowledge of God) to the Gentiles and glory to Israel.
 - b) *Some will accept Him, but others will reject Him* (verses 34-35) – Simeon foresaw that reactions to Jesus would be mixed: some people will be raised up as a result of Him, while others will fall. He will be a "sign" that God is at work, but some people will speak against Him. As we study the life of Jesus, we will discover that many people, especially among the religious leaders, rejected and opposed Him. Simeon also said that a sword would pierce Mary's heart, foretelling the great suffering of Jesus that Mary would witness.
- Although we don't read what Anna actually said, it is clear that she too believed that Jesus was the one who would bring about "the redemption of Jerusalem". Anna was clearly identifying Jesus as the Messiah.
- Luke's statement in verse 40 emphasises the fact that Jesus was a human boy who had to develop physically like any child but that He also had great wisdom, so that people could see that God's grace was on Him.

Jesus visits the Temple aged twelve years (2:41-52)

Who is Jesus? God's Son

- This story has one main point. Although Jesus shows unusually great knowledge for His age, the real issue is who His father is. Mary describes Joseph as Jesus' father (verse 48). Joseph was His father by adoption and because he cared for Him, but he was not Jesus' genetic father. Jesus emphasises this by saying that He has been in His true Father's house, meaning the Temple, the house of God (verse 49). Even as a child Jesus knew His true identity.

John's Perspective (John 1:1-18) – God becomes human in Jesus

John describes Jesus' birth in a very different way from Luke. Whereas Luke writes from a human perspective about how people saw Jesus, John writes from God's perspective. John explains how Jesus existed forever before His own birth and how He came into the world. He gives us insights into both who Jesus is and why He came into the world:

WHO JESUS IS	WHY JESUS CAME
"The Word" (verse 1)	To make God known to people (verse 18)
The One who was with God "in the beginning" (before the Universe was created) (verses 1-2)	To show people the glory of God (verse 14)
God (verse 1)	To reveal God's grace and truth (verse 17)
The Creator of all things (verse 3)	To give us a new kind of relationship with God – so that we can become His children (verses 12-13)
The One who has life in Himself and gives it to others (verse 4)	To give light to all men in this world (verse 9)

Some phrases in this passage teach us a great deal about Jesus and His mission and deserve special mention:

The Word (verses 1 and 14) – God communicates to us

This may seem like an unusual title for Jesus, but it teaches us much about His mission. It emphasises the fact that He is God's communication to us. The Bible teaches that God has always been communicating with mankind: through the world He has created, through our conscience, and through the Bible. Jesus, however, communicates God to us in a greater way than anything else ever could. If we want to know what God is like we only need to look at Jesus.

The Unique One, who is Himself God (verse 18) – God is three persons in one (Trinity)

John very clearly teaches that Jesus was God. Many other verses in the New Testament also show that Jesus is God:

- John 10:30 – Jesus and the Father are one
- John 20:28-29 – Thomas calls Jesus "*My Lord and my God!*" and Jesus commends him for it
- Philippians 2:6-8 – Jesus was "*in very nature God!*" but became human
- Colossians 1:15 – Jesus is the "*image of the invisible God!*"
- Hebrews 1:3 – Jesus is "*the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being!*"
- I John 5:20 – Jesus is "*the true God and eternal life!*"

Jesus had a special relationship with God as His Father which was different from the normal way in which Jewish people spoke about God. In fact, Jesus even claimed that He and the father were one (John 10:30), meaning that they are one person (the Jews recognised this as a claim by Jesus that He was God, and tried to kill Him because of it – see John 10:33). Here in John chapter 1, Jesus is described as the "*One and Only!*" – this expresses the unique relationship Jesus had with the Father as the only "begotten" Son of God – the only Son who shares God's divine nature. In *Part 14* we will read more about Jesus' own claims to be God.

The claim that Jesus *is* God as well as being *with* God may seem confusing. The Bible teaches that there is only one true God, but we learn from the New Testament that there are three persons within God who are equal in power. In fact this truth is also found in the Old Testament, but less clearly (the plural in Genesis 1:26 for example). The three persons have only one purpose, and always work together. However, they each relate to us in different ways, and they also have a relationship with one another. So, the Word can be God but also be with God (the Father). The three are:

1. **Father** – often referred to simply as "God"
2. **Son** – the Word who became human and lived among us (verse 14), taking the name of Jesus
3. **Holy Spirit** – who lives in every true Christian

This is a difficult idea for us to understand because we are used to thinking of ourselves as individuals with only one personality and identity. God is greater than we are, and it should not surprise us if we cannot fully explain His nature. However, we must accept the Bible's teaching that the Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit are equally God. Christians often describe this reality as the "trinity" (meaning "three in unity"), although this word is never used in the Bible.

Unfailing love and faithfulness (verse 17) – God is always true and always loving

Other versions of the Bible translate these words "*grace and truth!*". These two words summarise Jesus', and therefore God's, character. He is equally balanced in truth and grace. God is always true and always right, but He is also always loving. Jesus was full of both truth, meaning that He never said or did anything wrong, and love, meaning that He never did or said anything that was unkind or unloving. This is a great proof that He was God as no one else could ever be so perfect. John could write later about Jesus: "*there is no sin in Him!*" (I John 3:5). The fact of God's truth and love is the basis of the greatest problem of the Bible. We have sinned against God, but He still loves us and wants to forgive us. How can God just forgive our sins without doing something wrong? How can He remain perfectly true and yet accept us into relationship with Him? The solution to the problem is found in the cross of Jesus. He died in our place, taking the punishment for our sins, so that God can remain right and uphold the truth (He has punished our sins in the death of Jesus) but also forgive and accept us.

Children of God (verses 12-13) – God wants us to love Him to

John says that many people rejected Jesus (verse 11), but that those who accepted Him and trusted in Him were given a new right to a new relationship with God. They can become God's children. They are not God's children in the same way as Jesus (He is the "*one and only Son!*" – verse 14), but Christians can have a close, intimate relationship with the Father. This relationship is based on faith, which means accepting God's word and depending on Him to save and lead.

Key Lesson: Jesus was both man and God and came to make it possible for us to know God

Luke and John teach us a lot about who Jesus was and why He came. He was the eternal God born as a human baby. He was both the Messiah descended from King David and the unique Son of God who had no beginning. He came to reveal God to us and to make it possible for us to become God's children through faith in Him.

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Part 11 – Jesus Begins His Public Ministry

Key Questions:

- How did Jesus begin His public ministry? How did people know He was really from God?

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus (Luke 3:1-20)

John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus (the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth – see *Part 9*). He was a remarkable person who dressed in clothes made from camel skin, ate honey and locusts (Matthew 3:4) and lived in the desert preaching about God's kingdom and baptising people in water. No wonder people came in large numbers to see this man!

The Historical setting (verses 1-2a)

Luke takes his usual care to put the events of this chapter in a historical context – verses 1 and 2 tell us the names of seven rulers and leaders who were responsible for four levels of government:

1. *Tiberius Caesar* – the Roman Emperor
2. *Pontius Pilate* – the Roman governor of Judea (the area in the south of Palestine around Jerusalem)
3. *Herod, Philip and Lysanius* – tetrarchs (rulers of the three other areas around Palestine). Herod and Philip were sons of Herod the Great (who was king when Jesus was born), while Lysanius ruled over Abilene from 14-29 AD. The "Herod" mentioned here was called more fully Herod Antipas, and he ruled over Galilee, the region where Jesus grew up.
4. *Annas and Caiaphas* – the High Priest(s) of the Jewish people. Although the Jews were ruled by the Romans, the High Priests had great influence over the people, as they were in charge of the worship in the Temple.

These names, and the date of the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius, put the date for these events at 28-29 AD.

John's Calling (verses 2b-6)

John's ministry was very important in God's plan. Luke shows this in two ways:

- a) John's message came from God (verse 2b) – John was a prophet just like in the Old Testament times
- b) John fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah (verses 4-6)

John's Message (verses 3, 7-18)

There are several key themes in John's message:

1. *Judgement* (verse 7) – God is going to judge people. John warned the people that they needed to be ready before the day when He does this. In particular, John warned people who thought they had a good relationship with God simply because they were Jews (verse 8). What they really needed was a personal relationship with God – they must seek Him.
2. *Repentance* (verses 3, 8-14) – John called people to repent – to turn from their sins to ask God for forgiveness (verse 3). The message of the Bible shows very clearly that we have done wrong before God, and we need His forgiveness. Repentance means to be sorry for doing wrong, and real repentance will show itself in a person's actions, for example:
 - a. Giving to people in need (verses 10-11)
 - b. Being honest in our work (verses 12-14)
 As a sign of their repentance, John baptised the people (to baptise means to immerse them in water).
3. *The Messiah* (verses 15-18) – People asked John if he was the Messiah God had promised, but he explained that He was not. John said four important things about the Messiah:
 - a. He is coming soon (verse 16)
 - b. He will be much greater than John (verse 16)
 - c. He will baptise "with the Holy Spirit" (verse 16) – in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit sometimes helped God's people to serve Him, but the Messiah will bring a new kind of relationship with Him.
 - d. He will judge people – He will also baptise with fire (verse 16). In the Bible fire is a picture of judgement, and John explains that the Messiah will judge people, separating them out like grain and chaff (verse 17).

John gives way to Jesus

John's identity (John 1:19-28)

The Jewish leaders wanted to know who John claimed he was (verse 20) and what right he had to baptise people (verse 25). They asked if he was the great prophet Elijah returned, or the great prophet spoken about in the Old Testament, or if he claimed to be the Messiah. John denied that he was any of these three, but he did claim that he was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy about the forerunner of the Messiah (verse 23), and said that the one he was preparing the way for was actually standing in the crowd amongst them (verse 26).

John baptises Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus came to John to be baptised by him. John did not want to baptise Jesus, because he knew that Jesus had no sin and did not need to repent, but Jesus insisted. Jesus wanted to be baptised not because He needed to repent, but to identify with John's ministry and to set an example (Jesus said "we must do everything that is right", verse 15). During His baptism John saw the Holy Spirit settling on Jesus and heard God the Father describe Jesus as His Son with whom He was "fully pleased" (it seems that only John and Jesus saw the dove and heard the voice from Heaven). This is another example of the three persons of God being in one place, and also tells us that Jesus was unique – the Son of God who had no sin. It was this that convinced John that Jesus really was the Messiah and the Son of God. So, Jesus' baptism:

1. Identified Jesus with John's ministry – Jesus would continue on from John
2. Proved (to John) that Jesus was God's sinless Son
3. Marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry – it introduced Him to the people

John points people to follow Jesus (John 1:29-34)

This event happened after Jesus was baptised by John (possibly the following day). John spoke out about Jesus and told the people that:

- (i) *Jesus is far greater than John because He existed long before him* (verse 30)
- (ii) *Jesus was the one John was waiting for (the Messiah)* (verse 32-34) – this was revealed to John by God Himself when He spoke from Heaven at Jesus' baptism.
- (iii) *Jesus is the Son of God* (verse 34)
- (iv) *Jesus is the "Lamb of God", who takes away the sin of the world* (verse 29) – this is a prophecy about why Jesus came to earth. In the Old Testament system of sacrifices a lamb was killed by the priest as a sacrifice for the sin of the people. John is predicting that Jesus will die as a sacrifice for the sin of the whole world! The people (and most probably John himself) did not understand this at the time.

John gives way to Jesus (John 3:22-36)

After Jesus was baptised by John He began to call disciples to follow Himself and He and His disciples even began baptising people (verse 22). John's followers were confused and disappointed that Jesus was becoming more popular than John (verse 26). John, however, was not disappointed. He knew that he had done the work that God had given him to do – his job had been to prepare the way for the Messiah (verses 27-29). From now on John's ministry would give way to Jesus, and the people began to follow Jesus instead of John. John the Baptist summarised it like this:

He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. I am of the earth, and my understanding is limited to the things of earth, but he has come from heaven ... He is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God's Spirit is upon Him without measure or limit. (John 3:30-34)

John was later arrested by King Herod Antipas because he spoke out against the corruption of Herod's rule (see Luke 3:19-20). Herod eventually had John beheaded (see Mark 6:17-29) but before this John sent his followers to meet Jesus. Jesus sent a message reassuring John that He really was the Messiah (see Luke 7:18-35). Jesus said that John was the greatest prophet who ever spoke from God, but that even the least person in the Kingdom of God would be greater than John.

Jesus is tested and found to be sinless (Luke 4:1-13)

The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of His public ministry. After this He went into the desert for 40 days, where He fasted. At the end of the forty days, when Jesus was very hungry, the Devil spoke to Him. The Devil (or Satan) is the enemy of God, who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. His mission is to lead people away from God, and one way he does this is to tempt them to do what is wrong. In the case of Jesus, Satan attacked Him in three ways:

1. **To turn a stone into bread** – Satan chose this temptation at a time when Jesus was hungry. Jesus answered with a quote from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 8:3), saying that people need more than just bread to live.
2. **To worship Satan in return for all the kingdoms of earth** – Jesus again quoted the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:13), saying that people should only worship God.
3. **To jump off the Temple** – Satan was very clever this time, and quoted from the Old Testament himself, quoting a promise of God from Psalm 91:11-12 that God would protect the person who trusts in Him with His angels. Jesus, however, refused, quoting an Old Testament command saying that it is wrong to test God (Deuteronomy 6:16). Satan had tried to twist God's word to tempt Jesus, but Jesus was true to God's word.

These temptations cover three major areas of sin for human beings:

1. **Selfishness** – Jesus refused to perform a miracle to fulfil His own needs. He was able to control his natural desires (in this case hunger) and do what was right at all times.
2. **Greed** – Jesus refused to take all the power and riches the world can offer. He recognised that man's first responsibility is to worship God and honour Him.
3. **Pride** – Jesus refused to test God by acting in a proud way. He realised that God's promises are not given to allow us to do what we want or boast, but that we should trust God, not test Him. Trusting God does not mean demanding that He does what we want but surrendering to Him and obeying what He wants.

These three things really describe one thing, which is the very centre of sin: the rejection of God as our King – **sin is when human beings reject God's rule and worship other things in His place**. Every other human being has fallen on each of these tests. Only Jesus, the Son of God, could resist. More importantly, we cannot say that we have always trusted God and worshipped Him – only Jesus could do that. This episode proved that Jesus was exactly who Satan had thought He might be, the Son of God. We are sinners who need God's forgiveness, but Jesus is the sinless Son of God who came to save us from our sin. The claim that Jesus was sinless is found throughout the New Testament:

- **Jesus himself claimed it:** "*Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin?*" (John 8:46)
- **John claimed it:** "*there is no sin in Him*" (1 John 3:5)
- **Peter claimed it:** "*He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone*" (1 Peter 2:22)
- **Paul claimed it:** "*Christ, who never sinned*" (11 Corinthians 5:21)

This claim that Jesus was completely sinless is vital to understanding His mission. If He was not sinless He could not be the perfect sacrifice for sins and His claims to be God were false. Because He did not sin, He must be God, and His death is able to be the one sacrifice for our sins forever.

Key Lesson: Jesus was the sinless Son of God come to restore God's Kingdom

John was the last and greatest prophet pointing forward to the Messiah. He handed on his ministry to Jesus, telling people that He was the Messiah, the Son of God and the Lamb of God. Jesus was tested by Satan in the desert and proved to be completely sinless. Jesus was unique among human beings. We are sinners – He is the sinless Saviour.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 12 – The Mission of Jesus

Key Questions:

- Why did Jesus come into the world? What did He expect from His followers and what did He offer in return?

Jesus' three years of public ministry

Jesus' ministry began around 29 AD when John the Baptist baptised Him. He died around three and a half years later in 33 AD. The three years of Jesus' public ministry represent three different stages in the response of the people to Him:

1. **Year 1 (beginnings)** – Jesus was baptised by John and began His teaching and miracles. He began to become well known. His ministry opened with a dramatic statement: "*The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15). This was Jesus' mission, to call people to enter the Kingdom of God.
2. **Year 2 (popularity)** – Jesus became very popular because of His teaching and miracles. Thousands of people followed Him everywhere. Many of these people came from His home region of Galilee.
3. **Year 3 (rejection)** – the Jewish leaders began to oppose Jesus more openly, and many people left Him because they couldn't understand His teachings and because He didn't act in the way they expected the Messiah to act. Other disciples remained committed to following Him despite this growing opposition.

During each of these three years Jesus made a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. On some occasions he passed through Samaria (a region between Galilee and Judea), which was unusual for a Jew since most Jews hated the Samaritans. On His final trip to Jerusalem Jesus was arrested and executed.

The Call to Discipleship – surrender everything to follow Jesus

Jesus called people to follow Him as disciples. A disciple is someone who learns from a master. Jesus called people to follow Him throughout His ministry, but made it clear that deciding to follow Him is a serious thing:

Rest for weary people (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus recognised that many people are weary and heavily burdened by anxiety, guilt and shame. Ultimately they are burdened because they are under slavery to sin, which weighs them down. However, if we want to come to Jesus He said that we must take His yoke on ourselves. A yoke is a wooden bar that holds two animals together when they are pulling a plough in a field, and in the Old Testament it was used to picture the rule of a King. The King's people were yoked to Him. Jesus was saying that if we want to know the rest He offers we must submit to His Kingship over our lives. If we do, we can learn from Him and find rest for our souls as His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Unfortunately many people expect God to forgive their sins and help them through life, but they do not want to submit to His rule over their lives. Jesus does not offer that choice. **To know His help and strength we must accept His rule.**

Take up the cross (Matthew 16:24-26)

In the later part of His ministry, after His disciples had already realised who He was, Jesus began to challenge people who wanted to follow Him to think about what it would cost them. He told them that they must take up their cross to follow Him. Crucifixion was a method of executing criminals, and Jesus was saying that if people wanted to follow Him they had to die to their own rights and will. To follow Jesus is to take a painful way of denying ourselves. We cannot follow Him and still do whatever we want – we must follow His will. Following Him may also mean suffering in this life, but if we only set our ambition on gaining things in this world (success, money, power, popularity etc.) we will not build anything that will last after this life is over and we will lose our life. On the other hand, if we surrender our own life to Jesus we will actually gain it. We do not have the power to keep our own lives, so we should entrust them to Him. Being a disciple means making a total commitment to Christ. What would you give in exchange for your soul? What matters more than knowing that you have eternal life? **To have real life we must surrender everything to Jesus.**

Jesus chooses His twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16)

During His public ministry Jesus had many disciples, but He chose twelve to be His closest followers. He spent much of His time training these twelve men to become the leaders of the Christian Church after He left this world to return to His Father, and much of His teaching was directed towards them. He gave them the special designation "apostles", a word which means that they were sent into the world as His special representatives. By knowing who these twelve men were we can learn what kind of people Jesus cared about and accepted as His close friends:

1. **Simon Peter** – Simon was a fisherman for whom Jesus invented the new name "Peter". He was the leader of the twelve, and often spoke out as their representative. He wrote two books in the New Testament (I and II Peter), and Mark's gospel is a record of the things he remembered about Jesus. See *Part 17* for more about his story.
2. **Andrew** – the brother of Peter, and also a fisherman. Andrew is best remembered for bringing people to Jesus, including his brother Peter. See John 1:35-42 for the story of how Jesus called Andrew.
3. **James** – the brother of John, also a fisherman. James and John both worked in Peter's family business. Luke 5:10 and Matthew 4:21-22 tell us how Jesus called James and John
4. **John** – wrote five books in the New Testament, John's gospel, I, II & III John and Revelation.
5. **Matthew** – the author of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew (also called Levi) was a tax collector working for the Romans, a much hated profession among the Jews. Luke 5:27-32 and Matthew 9:9-13 tell us about the calling of Matthew.

6. **Philip** – see John 1:43-51 for the calling of Philip, who was also from Peter's home town.
7. **Thomas** – also called Didymus. Thomas is most famous for doubting that Jesus had been raised from the dead until he actually saw Him (see John 20:26-29).
8. **Simon the Zealot** – the Zealots were a radical Jewish group who strongly opposed Roman rule
9. **Judas Iscariot** – this disciple betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver when He was arrested. He had the responsibility of looking after the money bag for the disciples, but he was a thief and used to steal from it (John 12:4-6). It seems that he was never really a genuine follower of Jesus.
10. **Bartholomew** 11. **James the son of Alphaeus** 12. **Judas the son of James**

This group included political radicals, hated tax collectors, unknown people, at least four fishermen, and even one traitor. They are hardly the kind of people most people would choose to lead a new religious movement! In choosing these men Jesus showed that He had a unique knowledge of the hearts of people and that He had come to call all kinds of people to follow Him and to transform the lives of those people who would become His disciples. As we read the Gospels it is clear that this was Jesus' mission, and that everyone who responded to His call was changed.

Jesus' Mission – why did He come into the World?

Why did Jesus come into the world? He gave at least five answers to this question, all of them recorded in John's gospel:

1. ***"To do the will of God who sent me"*** (John 6:38) – Jesus taught that He was the special messenger of God who always obeyed what the Father said.
2. ***"I came to bring truth to the world"*** (John 18:37) – Jesus claimed that He was speaking God's truth, and that those who love truth would recognise it
3. ***"I have come to judge the world ... to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they can see that they are blind"*** (John 9:39) – Jesus challenged people to realise that they were spiritually blind, meaning that they did not know God. He showed people who realised that they were spiritually blind that God loved them and they could have sight, and challenged those people who thought that they were already accepted by God to realise their sin and repent of it.
4. ***"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness"*** (John 12:46) – Jesus claimed that this world is in darkness because of sin, and that He had come to shine His light (knowledge about God) into the world. He claimed that people who trust in Him will never be in darkness again, in other words that by trusting in Him they could really know God personally.
5. ***"My purpose is to give life in all its fullness"*** (John 10:10) – Jesus claimed that His followers could have a different quality of life from the normal. He said that they could have the fullest life possible. The Bible claims that a life without God is incomplete, but that when we come to know God through Jesus we can have a life that is full of peace, joy and contentment.

Eternal Life – God's gift given through Jesus

One story in John's Gospel chapter 3 provides a very clear summary of Jesus' mission and helps us to understand what this *"life in all its fullness"* that Jesus offered really is. This chapter records a meeting between Jesus and a religious leader of the Jews called **Nicodemus**. Nicodemus was a respected teacher of the people – one of the top professors in the country (verse 10). He came to Jesus at night, perhaps because he was too proud to come during the day, or because he wanted to keep his visit a secret, or possibly because it was the best time to meet Jesus, who was very busy during the daytime. Nicodemus recognised that Jesus came from God because of the miracles He performed (see *Part 14*).

Jesus told Nicodemus that if he wanted to see God's Kingdom he must have a new birth – not a physical birth, but a spiritual one (verse 5). In other words, Jesus told this leading Jewish teacher that he was not even alive spiritually! We all begin life far from God (not in His Kingdom) and so spiritually dead. We enter into a relationship with God (enter into His Kingdom) by being born again with a new kind of life which is:

1. **Spiritual, not physical (verse 5)**
2. **Given to people by the Holy Spirit (verse 6)**
3. **Eternal (verse 15)** ("eternal" means it can never end). This life carries on after the body has died.
4. **Received through faith in Jesus (verse 15)** – by trusting in Him to save and lead you
5. **Available because of Jesus' death (verse 14)** – when Jesus spoke of being lifted up He was speaking about His death on the cross (see Numbers 21:4-9 for the story of Moses and the snake)

In verses 16-21, John comments on these words of Jesus, and shows us that there are two groups of people:

- a) **People who trust in Jesus** – These people have eternal life and will not be condemned. They will be saved because they have trusted in Jesus. God wants all people to be in this group, because He loves them. That is why He sent Jesus into the world (verse 17).
- b) **People who have not trusted Him** – These people have already been judged (verse 18) because they preferred to sin in the darkness than to come to the light of God (verse 20).

John's summary of Jesus' mission in verses 16-17 are possibly the most famous words in the Bible:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.

Key Lesson: Jesus called people to surrender everything to receive eternal life from Him

Jesus called people to follow Him, and to do this they had to surrender everything else and accept His rule over their lives. In exchange He offered them eternal life, life in all its fullness, which is received through faith in Him.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 13 – The Message of Jesus

Key Questions:

- What did Jesus teach? How can a person be part of the Kingdom of God?

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Jesus taught a great deal about the Kingdom of God. In Matthew's Gospel it is most often referred to as the "*Kingdom of Heaven*". The two phrases mean exactly the same thing.

Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God was present (Matthew 4:17)

Jesus began His public ministry by boldly declaring that the Kingdom of God was near and that people must repent to get ready for it. This was the message that John had preached (Matthew 3:1-2), and Jesus was continuing on from John's ministry. However, as Jesus continued to teach and began to perform miracles He also claimed that His miracles, and especially His ability to cast out demons, were proof that the Kingdom had come (Matthew 12:28). Although Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies about the coming King and His teaching and miracles were evidence of His authority, it was not until shortly before His death that Jesus stated directly that he was the "*King of the Jews*" (Matthew 27:11). During His ministry He wanted people to realise this for themselves.

Jesus revealed what the Kingdom of God is like (Matthew 5:3-10; Matthew 13)

The "Sermon on the Mount" (Jesus' longest recorded teaching found in Matthew chapters 5-7) is a manifesto for how people should live in the Kingdom of God. The opening verses of the Sermon describe the kind of people who make up the Kingdom of God – the kind of people Jesus was interested in reaching. The list is amazing, describing exactly the opposite of the kind of people the world thinks are powerful! Jesus says that "*God blesses those who realise their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them*" (Matthew 5:3). **To be part of God's kingdom you must first realise that you need God (without Him your life is not complete) and that you need His forgiveness for your sin.** The Kingdom of God is upside down compared to other kingdoms – the humble, small people are the greatest people in God's Kingdom because they are the most available to God (see Matthew 18:4). Jesus also told many parables to help people understand God's Kingdom. Many of His parables open with the words, "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...*" Matthew chapter 13 records seven parables of the Kingdom.

Jesus showed us how we can enter the Kingdom of God

On several occasions Jesus taught important truths about how people can enter God's Kingdom:

1. *We cannot be good enough on our own to enter the Kingdom* (Matthew 5:20) – in this verse Jesus says that we must obey God even better than the Pharisees did. Of course, this is impossible as the Pharisees were very strict about obeying God's Law. Jesus' point is that we must realise that we can never fully keep God's Law – we have all sinned and therefore need forgiveness to be part of His Kingdom
2. *To enter the Kingdom we must do what God says, not just act the part* (Matthew 7:21-23) – Jesus warns us that even some people who say they are His followers will not enter the Kingdom. Many people claim to follow Jesus, but they don't take His teachings seriously. They believe they can choose some of His teachings that suit them and forget others. Jesus says they won't be in the Kingdom.
3. *To enter the Kingdom we must humble ourselves like little children* (Matthew 18:3) – Jesus is not saying that we should act immaturely like little children, but that we must realise that before God we are just like little children, and that we are completely dependent on Him. We cannot make ourselves good enough to enter the Kingdom; we have to depend on God to make us right.
4. *Other things, like possessions, can distract us from the Kingdom* (Matthew 19:24) – this warning comes just after a rich young man came to Jesus. Jesus told him to sell his possessions if he wanted to have eternal life, but the man wasn't prepared to do this. The fact is that to enter the Kingdom we must make it our number one priority.
5. *Even sinners can enter the Kingdom if they repent* (Matthew 21:31-32) – in this passage Jesus is speaking to the chief priests, and his words would have been extremely shocking to them. He says that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom before these well educated religious leaders. How could this be? Why would God accept people who were well known for their sins before highly religious men? The answer is simple – these people had heard John the Baptist preaching and had repented from their sins, but the chief priests were so full of pride that they didn't think they needed to repent. Any person can enter the Kingdom, but only if they are prepared to admit that they have sinned and ask God to forgive and lead them.

The teaching of Jesus – the highest standard of ethics

The teaching of Jesus was unique, and set a higher standard than any other teacher the world has ever seen:

1. Jesus' teaching fulfilled the Old Testament Law of God

The Old Testament Law showed the people of Israel what was right and wrong in God's eyes and how to live as His special nation. Jesus said that He had come to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17-20), meaning three things:

- a) *That Jesus Himself kept the whole Old Testament Law, since He never sinned*

- b) *That His teaching restored the Old Testament Law to its original standard and purpose*
 c) *That His death as the one perfect sacrifice for sin would meet the Law's demands and fulfil its imagery*

In Matthew 5:21-48 we have six examples of Jesus teaching about Old Testament laws. The Jewish teachers (Rabbis) had changed the standard of the Law in three ways:

- By focusing on actions and ignoring the heart* – Jesus taught that the attitude of our heart is just as important as our actions. Sin is not just the wrong actions we commit, but the wrong desires of our hearts.
- By limiting its requirements to "religious" activities* – they acted as if God was involved in some parts of life but could be left out of other parts of life. Jesus showed that God knows and cares about every part of our lives.
- By limiting their responsibility just to people who they thought deserved it* – anyone who wasn't good enough (including prostitutes, tax collectors and anyone who wasn't Jewish) did not deserve anything good from them, and in fact was an "enemy" who should be hated. Jesus showed they were wrong when He told a story about a Samaritan man (the Samaritans were the natural enemy of the Jews) who showed love to an injured Jewish man (see Luke 10:25-37). This story shows that our neighbour is not just the person who would naturally be our friend or who can repay us with his friendship. All human beings are our neighbours and the Old Testament command to love our neighbour means that we must show love to everyone as God enables us.

The result was that the Pharisees believed that they were acceptable before God and missed the amount of sin that was in their own lives. They didn't realise how much they needed God's forgiveness. Jesus restored the Law by showing that the three limitations the Pharisees had placed on the law were wrong and by showing that we are sinful before God and need Him to forgive and lead us (this was why the Law was given by God). The people recognised that Jesus taught as if He had authority, unlike the usual teachers of the Law (see Matthew 7:28-29). They merely taught from what had already been written, but Jesus had authority to say exactly what the Law meant.

2. Jesus' ethical teaching is summarised in the "Golden Rule"

One of the most famous statements Jesus made was this:

Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12)

Interestingly, there are similar rules in many philosophies from all over the world, including Confucius, who said: *"What you do not want done to you, do not do to others."* The fact that similar rules were recognised in so many places is evidence for the fact that God created mankind and gave us the same sense of right and wrong (our conscience). However, Jesus' statement sets a higher standard than any of the other philosophies. They all say that we SHOULD NOT do what we don't want others to do to us, but Jesus' statement is positive, that we SHOULD do what we would like other people to do for us. Jesus' teaching is the purest, highest ethical standard.

3. Jesus demanded a response to His teaching

The central claim of Jesus' teaching was that God's Kingdom was being revealed and that people must decide whether to repent and become part of it or not. In other words, the ethical teaching of Jesus is for those people who recognise God as their King and have the new relationship with Him that Jesus came to make possible. At the end of the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus challenged His hearers about how they would respond to His words (Matthew 7:13-27). He is the King, and He had just presented His manifesto for His Kingdom, and now they had to decide whether or not they would submit to His rule. Jesus used three pictures to describe this choice:

- Narrow and wide gates* (verses 13-14) – His words are like a narrow gate that leads to life and few people will enter by it, whilst the majority of people are heading for destruction
- Good and bad trees* (verses 15-23) – there are false prophets whose teaching leads to bad results (bad trees producing bad fruit), but Jesus' teaching will lead to good results (good fruit). He warned that these false prophets will deceive people and that they will claim to be His followers although in fact they are not.
- Wise and foolish builders* (verses 24-27) – this story presents those who obey Jesus' teaching as wise people who have found a solid foundation for life. Their lives will never be destroyed.

Parables – everyday stories with spiritual meanings

Jesus often taught using parables (stories about everyday life that teach spiritual truths – see *Module 2 Study Aids* for a table of Jesus' parables). Some parables are easier to understand than others. In fact, some parables were designed to make it difficult for people to understand. In **Matthew 13:10**, Jesus' disciples asked Him why He always used parables. Jesus explained that some people were open to His teaching – they would keep thinking and seeking understanding from God until they got the message of the parable. Other people were not really listening, and they would never get the message. Jesus only wanted to reveal the truth about His Kingdom to people who were really serious about seeking God.

One of the best known parables is the Parable of the soils (or sower) in **Matthew 13:1-23**. This parable speaks about four different responses people make to the message about the Kingdom of God:

- **Seed on the path** – people who don't understand the message – Satan snatches the seed away
- **Seed on the rocky soil** – people who initially receive the message but turn away when it becomes difficult
- **Seed on the thorny ground** – people who initially receive the message but are distracted by other concerns
- **Seed on the good ground** – people who really receive the message and produce real fruit as a result

The Bible tells us the good news that God's Kingdom is here and we can be part of it if we repent (turn from our sins) and trust in Christ to forgive and lead us. People still respond in the same four ways today. For each person the question is: **What kind of soil are you? How will you respond to the message of God?**

Key Lesson: Jesus taught us what God's Kingdom is like and how we can be part of it

Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. He showed us what the Kingdom of God is like but also how we can be part of it through repenting and trusting in God. He demanded a response to His teaching and said that only those who build their lives on His teaching will survive the future judgement. How will you respond to His teaching?

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 14 – Responses to Jesus

Key Questions:

- What evidence is there to support Jesus' claims about Himself? How did people respond to Jesus' teaching?

Who did Jesus claim that He was?

John records seven sayings of Jesus about who He is that all start with the words "I am ...":

1. **I am the bread of life.** *No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again.* (John 6:35)
2. **I am the light of the world.** *If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life* (John 8:12)
3. **I am the gate for the sheep ...** *Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go they will find green pastures... My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.* (John 10:7-10)
4. **I am the good shepherd.** *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep* (John 10:11)
5. **I am the resurrection and the life.** *Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me* (John 11:25-26)
6. **I am the way, the truth and the life.** *No one can come to the Father except through me* (John 14:6)
7. **I am the vine;** *you are the branches. Those who remain in me ... produce much fruit* (John 15:5)

In summary, these seven sayings show us that Jesus claimed to:

- **Show us God's truth (the light) and make it possible for us to know God personally**
- **Give eternal life to people who believe in Him and sustain their life**
- **Satisfy the deepest needs of those who trust in Him, save them and keep them safe**

It is also important to notice that Jesus claimed to be the **ONLY** person who could do these things. In John 8:31-58 Jesus said to some Jewish people, *"Before Abraham was born I am"* (verse 58). These Jews believed that they would be accepted by God because they were descendants of Abraham, but Jesus shocked them by saying that their father was not Abraham, or God (verse 41), but Satan (verse 44), since they had not recognised who Jesus really was. The people accused Jesus of being possessed by an evil spirit, but He replied that anyone who obeys His teaching will never die (verse 51). The people asked if He thought that He was greater than Abraham (verse 53). They recognised that His claims about His teaching were unique! But Jesus went further in verse 58. The grammar is unusual because it mixes the past tense (*was*) with the present tense (*am*). The people were so shocked that they wanted to kill Jesus (verse 59). Why? What did Jesus' saying mean? The phrase "I am" was the name that God told Moses to use to describe Him (see Exodus 3:14-15). The Jews recognised that by using these words Jesus was claiming to be God, and that is why they wanted to kill Him! Later people tried to stone Jesus a second time. That time it was because He said *"The Father and I are one"* (John 10:30). These people objected to Jesus' claim because, in their words, *"you, a mere man, have made yourself God"* (John 10:33). **Jesus claimed to be no less than God, the true King!**

The Miracles of Jesus

There are many amazing miracles in the life of Jesus. The most amazing are His virgin birth and His resurrection from the dead. However, during His life he also performed many amazing miracles. These are significant because in the Bible they are called "signs". In other words, the miracles were not just to help other people (although that was important), but also to show that Jesus was someone very special. The miracles show that **Jesus had authority over:**

1. **The laws of nature** – Jesus was able to over-rule the normal laws of science by, for example:
 - (i) *Creating new matter* – He fed over 5000 people using five loaves and two fish (John 6:1-15)
 - (ii) *Transforming matter* – He changed water into wine (John 2:1-11)
 - (iii) *Controlling the weather* – He calmed storms on more than one occasion (Mark 4:35-41)
 - (iv) *Walking on water* – He could control the basic forces of physics (Matthew 14:22-36, John 6:16-21)
2. **Diseases** – Jesus was able to heal people of many diseases, including:
 - (i) *Infectious diseases* – including the skin disease leprosy (Luke 5:12-16) and fevers (Mark 1:29-34)
 - (ii) *Diseases including muscle wasting* – for example, lame people could walk again (Luke 5:17-26, John 5:1-15)
 - (iii) *Congenital diseases* (present from birth) – for example, a man who was born blind could see (John 9:1-41)
3. **Evil spirits** – Several times we read of Jesus casting evil spirits out of people. These demons recognised Him as the Son of God (see, for example, Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).
4. **Death** – Jesus raised at least three dead people back to life (see Luke 7:11-17; Luke 8:40-56; John 11:1-44).
5. **Sin** – Several times when Jesus healed people's illnesses He talked about their sin as well, and claimed that He was able to forgive their sins. One example is a paralysed man in Luke 5:17-26. Jesus told this man that his sins were forgiven because of his faith (verse 20). The religious teachers were shocked. They said *"Who but God can forgive sins!"* Jesus then healed the man to prove that He had the authority to forgive sins.

Who could have authority over nature, illness, evil spirits, life and death, and even authority to forgive sins?

Jesus miracles were intended to help people realise exactly who He was: the true King over all creation, God Himself! They also show us what God's Kingdom is like: a place free from sin, disease and death. If we are part of God's Kingdom, we can look forward to the future day when this Kingdom will finally be perfectly revealed (see *Part 23*).

How people responded to Jesus

During the second year of Jesus' ministry, thousands of people followed Him. However, the following year many of these people began to turn away from Him. The people who followed Jesus had different reasons for following Him. Some thought He would heal them from all their illnesses or that He would become King and make them very powerful in His Kingdom. Whenever they realised that Jesus would not become King of Israel at that time, many of these people rejected Him. This was just as Jesus had predicted in His parable about the soils (see *Part 13*).

To understand this we must understand what the Jewish people expected the Messiah to do. In *Part 7* we learned that there are two aspects to the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah:

- a) **The Suffering Servant** – who would die as a sacrifice for the sins of the people
- b) **The Conquering King** – who would defeat the enemies of God and rule on David's throne

By the time when Jesus lived, most religious teachers taught that the Messiah would be a *Conquering King*, but they believed that the prophecies about the *Suffering Servant* could not refer to the same person. They didn't believe that the Messiah could possibly die, as they thought that a good person who was faithful to God should not suffer, so they decided that those Old Testament passages must actually refer to the suffering of the nation of Israel rather than to the Messiah. At the time when Jesus lived, the Jews were ruled by the Roman Empire, but they were very unhappy with this situation. They hoped that the *Conquering King* would come soon and defeat the Romans, setting up a new Jewish Kingdom where he would rule on David's throne. When Jesus began teaching about the Kingdom of God and performing miracles these people believed that He might be the Messiah.

However, Jesus refused to allow the people to make Him King (see John 6:14&15), and later He began to teach that He must die. In John 12:20-36 Jesus predicted His death on a cross (verses 23-24, 32-33), saying that this was the reason why He had come into the world (verse 27). This did not fit the crowd's idea about what the Messiah should be like. In verse 34 they say, "*We understand from Scripture that the Messiah would live forever*". They were right, as the Old Testament had said that the Conquering King would reign on David's throne forever, but they didn't realise that the Messiah must first be the Suffering Servant who would die as a sacrifice for their sins. **Only after His death, when people could have their sins forgiven, could God's Kingdom really be restored.** Verse 37 is very sad: "*But despite of all the miraculous signs He had done, most of the people did not believe in Him*". The miracles and teaching of Jesus should have shown people that He was the Messiah, but many people were so fixed in their own ideas of what the Messiah should be and so spiritually blind that they could not recognise Him. They did not realise their own sin and need of God's forgiveness.

The responses of some specific groups to Jesus are particularly important to understand:

- **Demons** (evil spirits) – On a number of occasions when Jesus cast out evil spirits from people the spirits recognised Him as the Son of God who had power to punish them (see Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28).
- **Jesus' brothers** – Jesus had at least four half-brothers, named James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (see Matthew 13:55). During His ministry they didn't believe in Him (see John 7:1-9). However, after His death and resurrection, at least two of these brothers (James and Judas) became Christians.
- **Jesus' twelve disciples** – The twelve disciples were the closest people to Jesus during His life on earth. They took some time to realise who Jesus really was, largely because they had the same expectations about what the Messiah should be like as most other people. Simon Peter is the member of this group about whom we read most in the Gospels. We will learn about His life and journey to faith in *Part 17*. The only one of the twelve who did not remain a follower of Jesus was Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus for a payment of money (he was actually a thief all along and never a true disciple), although he regretted this decision afterwards and committed suicide.
- **The religious leaders** – The Jewish religious leaders belonged to several groups including the Pharisees and Sadducees (see *Part 9*). Although some religious leaders, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (see *Part 12*), became disciples of Jesus, He was unpopular with many of them for several reasons:
 - (i) He showed love to people the Pharisees considered "sinners" (for example prostitutes and tax collectors)
 - (ii) He told the religious leaders that they were also sinners who needed God's forgiveness
 - (iii) He did not obey certain rules that the Pharisees had added to the Old Testament Law
 - (iv) He claimed to be God, which the religious leaders saw as blasphemous and punishable by death
 - (v) He threatened the power and income of the Sadducees as He wanted to purify the Temple (see *Part 15*)
 - (vi) The Sadducees were afraid that if too many people followed Him the Romans might punish them

Because of these different reasons, members of both of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were not usually allies with each other, joined together to oppose Jesus and began to plot to have Him executed. Much of Jesus' teaching was actually in response to questions from members of the various religious groups.

How should we respond to Jesus?

When we study the teaching and life of Jesus we should be clear about what He claimed about Himself and His mission. He claimed that He was the unique Son of God who had come to establish God's Kingdom among us, and the only Way to really know the creator God. He did not offer us the option of following some of His teachings and some teachings of another religion or philosophy or of accepting Him as a good teacher but not God. It is either Jesus **OR** something else, but you can't have Jesus **AND** something else. According to Belfast-born Christian writer and Oxford professor (author of the Narnia stories), CS Lewis, there are only three possible ways to respond to Jesus' claim to be God:

- a) **He was mad** – perhaps He was insane (John 10:20). But could a mad man speak and think so clearly?
- b) **He was bad** – others said He was demon possessed. But could an evil person do such good things?
- c) **He was God** – if this is true, we must consider what difference it should make to our lives

Key Lesson: Jesus' miracles support His claim to be God – we must respond to this claim

The miracles of Jesus prove His authority over nature, disease, evil spirits, death and even sin, supporting His claim to be God living as a human being. We must decide if we think He was mad, bad or God.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 15 – One Week in Jerusalem

Key Questions:

- How did Jesus end up being crucified? Why exactly do Christians believe that Jesus had to die?

The Last Week of Jesus' Life

Most of the religious leaders who were planning to have Jesus executed lived in Jerusalem, making it a dangerous place for Him to be. You might expect, then, that He would stay away from this city where His enemies were based. However, Jesus actually knew that He would die on a cross, and He believed that this was the reason why He had come to earth (John 12:27). In the third year of His ministry, even though opposition to His ministry was increasing, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, just as He had in the previous two years. He arrived at Jerusalem on a Sunday, and the following Friday He was executed. We can attempt to date these events based on references in the Gospels:

a) The day of the crucifixion was the day before the Sabbath, that is a Friday (Matthew 27:62; John 19:31).

b) It was also the Day of Preparation for the Passover (John 18:28; 19:14) – this is the Jewish date 14th Nisan.

The 14th day of Nisan was only a Friday twice in the range AD 28-34: 7th April 30 and 3rd April 33. Since the ministry of John the Baptist began during the 15th year of the Emperor Tiberius, i.e. 28-29 AD (Luke 3:1-4 – Tiberius reigned 14-37 AD), this makes **3rd April 33 AD** more likely as the date of Jesus' crucifixion.

Sunday – Jesus enters the City of Jerusalem riding on a Donkey [Now known as: *Palm Sunday*]

Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem He was surrounded by His followers, who mainly came from Galilee. Jesus asked His disciples to get Him a donkey to ride into the city (fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey). Jesus' followers were very happy as they believed that Jesus would become the king in Jerusalem and restore God's Kingdom on earth. They waved palm branches in the air and shouted praises to God.

Monday – Jesus cleanses the Temple

Matthew 21:12-20; Mark 11:12-21; Luke 19:45-46

During His first year of ministry when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the Passover, He had visited the Temple and had driven out the money changers and shop-owners who had stalls there (see John 2:13-25). On this last visit to Jerusalem He did exactly the same thing. Jesus was very angry about these people using the Temple to make money. It was supposed to be a place where people could worship God, but these men were using it for business! His action threatened the Sadducees financially. As High Priests they controlled the business in the Temple and made money from it. Jesus' action was right, but it was also deliberately planned to increase the opposition against Him.

Tuesday and Wednesday – Jesus' teaching and the plans of His enemies

Matthew 21:23-26:5; Mark 11:27-14:2; Luke 20:1-22:6

During these two days Jesus taught in Jerusalem, mainly about the future. He also faced some challenges about His own authority (see Luke 20:1-8) and spoke out against the hypocritical religious leaders (see Luke 20:9-19). His enemies began to plot a way to arrest Jesus, but were finding it difficult to know how to do it without causing a riot among the people, as Jesus still had many followers. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, made an agreement with the Jewish leaders to hand Jesus over to them, giving them the opportunity they were looking for to arrest Him.

Thursday – The Passover and the Lord's Supper – Jesus betrayed and arrested

Matthew 26:17-56; Mark 14:12-52; Luke 22:7-51; John 12:1-18:13

Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His twelve disciples. Before the meal He did something amazing: He washed their feet, a job that a servant, not the Master, should do (see John 13:1-17). He did this to show His love for them and to teach them that they should also be servants of others. After the meal He did something new (see Luke 22:19-20). He took bread and broke it and said that it represented His body given for them, and told them to do it to remember Him. He also took a cup of wine and said it represented God's **New Covenant** with them which was sealed by the blood He would pour out. It must have seemed strange to the disciples. Jesus was with them, but He was teaching them to remember Him. He was alive, but He was speaking about His death. This was the beginning of the Lord's Supper, which Christians still practice in churches today as a way to remember Jesus (see *Part 20*).

Next, Jesus shared some parting teaching with His disciples, recorded in John 14-16. He explained that He must leave them soon, but that He would prepare a place for them in God's house and that one day He would return to take them to live there with Him. He also told them that He would send the Holy Spirit to live with them as their teacher and comforter after He had left them. Lastly He prayed a wonderful prayer for His disciples (see John chapter 17).

The disciples and Jesus left the city and went across a valley to a garden, where Jesus began to pray. It was now the middle of the night, and, although Jesus asked them to pray with Him, the disciples fell asleep. Jesus was in great pain as He prayed because He knew what lay ahead of Him. While He was in the garden, a group of soldiers from the High Priest's guard came to Him. Judas identified Jesus by kissing Him on the cheek, and the soldiers arrested Him. Simon Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword, but Jesus told him to put it away. The disciples were confused and ran away.

Friday – Trial and Death [Now known as: *Good Friday*]

Matthew 26:57-27:66; Mark 14:53-15:47; Luke 22:54-23:53; John 18:13-42

Jesus was taken for trial to the High Priest. He was beaten by soldiers, and the High Priest brought false witnesses to make accusations against Him. The High Priest accused Him of blasphemy, and wanted to kill Him. However, the Jewish

authorities needed permission for the execution from Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate did not want to kill Jesus, as he did not find Him guilty of any crime, and tried to pass the case to Herod Antipas, King of Galilee. Herod, however, returned Jesus to Pilate, who had Him beaten in the hope that this would be enough to please the priests. However, the priests had their supporters call out for Jesus to be executed, and Pilate, afraid that the Jews might riot if he didn't give them what they wanted, agreed to execute Jesus. Jesus was led out of the city to a hill and executed there on a cross. The disciples were very confused at this time. Simon Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. They couldn't understand why their Lord, who they believed to be the Messiah, had been killed in this way. They thought their hope was lost. Nicodemus and another wealthy Jew called Joseph took Jesus' body off the cross and buried it in Joseph's new tomb.

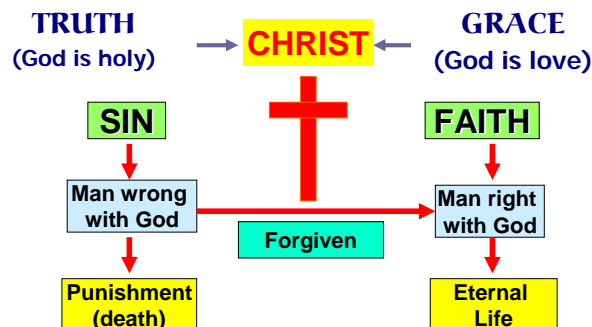
Why did Jesus have to die?

Death was the result of sin. Before sin came into the world there was no death, but after Adam (the first man) sinned, death came into the world. **Jesus was the only person who never sinned, and so He did not deserve to die.** It seems even more strange that He should die when you consider that He was God! How can God die? Jesus Himself said that no one could take His life away from Him, but He could lay it down (see John 10:17-18). No one else could say this – only Jesus had control over when He would die. He said that he had to die to bring us eternal life (see John 3:14-15), and to defeat the Devil (the "prince of this world", John 12:31). So, **Jesus believed that He had to die, but that His death would not be a defeat but a victory.** How can this be? The answer lies in the Old Testament prophecies. In Isaiah chapter 53 we read about the Suffering Servant, and in verses 11-12 it tells us why the Messiah had to suffer:

When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

So, Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53:10). He took our sins on Himself and died in our place. He took the punishment that we deserved for our sins, and so made it possible for us to be "counted righteous". This means literally, that Jesus died so that we can have eternal life. He was punished so that we can be declared "not guilty" by God. He took our sin so that when God looks at us He doesn't see any sin, but accepts us as right with Him (righteous).

This truth is also taught throughout the New Testament (see Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 10:1-18; I Peter 3:18). Although the disciples were confused when Jesus died, later they realised what His death had meant. The Old Testament sacrifices were only pictures of the one sacrifice that Jesus would make for the sins of all people. The Old Testament sacrifices of animals could never really pay the price for our sins – to do that we would need perfect (sinless) human being to die for us. In Jesus we have this perfect sacrifice that can really pay for our sins, so that if we trust in Him we can be completely forgiven. This is the amazing message of the Christian "gospel" (good news). This is the only way God can forgive us for our sins but still remain holy.



We can now summarise the message of the Bible so far in five simple points:

- 1. God created us to know Him and obey Him as our King**
The world God created was perfect – human beings had perfect relationships with God, one another and the earth.
- 2. We have rebelled against God's rule, and so we are in the wrong with God.**
God's creation was spoiled when the man and woman disobeyed Him, rejecting His rule. God is holy (perfect and just) and so He must punish sin. We deserve to be punished for our own sin because each of us has failed to reach God's perfect standard and has rebelled against His rule over our lives.
- 3. God still loves us, and wants us to know Him, so He sent Jesus to die for us**
As a result, He kept speaking to mankind throughout the centuries, especially through the people of Israel. God even gave the Jewish people a pattern of sacrifices to represent their sins being forgiven. Finally He came into the world Himself in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life which fully displayed God's character (full of grace and truth, love and holiness), and finally died on a cross for our sins. In the cross the justice and love of God meet – He punishes sin, but forgives the sinner. The cost was the death of Jesus.
- 4. We must respond to God in repentance and faith (submitting to His rule over us)**
Those who trust in Jesus can be forgiven and can receive a completely new life from God (born again). We can be made right with God through the cross. Instead of having the punishment we deserve for our sin, which is death and separation from God forever, we can receive eternal life as a gift from Him. To receive this gift we must repent (turn from sin to ask God for forgiveness) and trust in God to save us and lead us.
- 5. God will give us new life by His Holy Spirit and new power to live for Him**
When a person surrenders control of his life to God, he is born again and the Holy Spirit comes to live with him. God begins to change him from the inside out, giving new power to live the way He wants him to.

Key Lesson: Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice for sins

Although the enemies of Jesus thought they were executing Him and would get rid of a problem by doing this, it was actually God's plan that Jesus would die as the only perfect sacrifice for sins – including our sins.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 16 – Resurrection and Ascension

Key Questions:

- If Jesus was killed by His enemies how did His message survive? What gave His followers such confidence?

The burial of Jesus

The normal practice for a crucified person was for their body to be left on the cross to rot, and finally their remains to be buried in a communal grave. However, Joseph from Arimathea, a member of the Jewish leadership who was a secret follower of Jesus, asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body off the cross (Matthew 27:57-60). Pilate agreed after checking with his soldiers that Jesus was really dead (Mark 15:44-45). Joseph, with the help of another secret disciple, Nicodemus (John 19:38-42), buried the body in his own tomb which was cut out of a rock. This fulfilled a prophecy that the Suffering Servant would be buried with the rich (see Isaiah 53:9). The tomb was secured in three ways:

1. **A large stone was rolled over the doorway** (Matthew 27:60) – this stone would have been in a groove that sloped downwards. It could be rolled into place by one man, but needed several men to roll it open again.
2. **A seal was put on the stone** (Matthew 27:66) – breaking this seal would have carried a punishment.
3. **A guard was placed to prevent the body being stolen** (Matthew 27:62-66) – this was probably a guard of Roman soldiers (although it might possibly have been the Jewish Temple guard), who would have been punished very severely (perhaps even executed) if they failed in their mission.

Christ is risen!

Before His death Jesus not only predicted His death, but also told His disciples at least five times that He would rise to life again on the third day (see Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32). The disciples did not understand this at the time, perhaps because they were still expecting Jesus to become king when He reached Jerusalem. After Jesus died on the Friday, the remaining disciples hid themselves because they were afraid that they too might be arrested and executed. However, events on the Sunday changed everything, as the disciples claimed that Jesus appeared to them alive in a real body. To get a full account of events after the resurrection we must reconstruct it from the four Gospel accounts:

1. The women went to the tomb

[Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-9]

On the Sunday very early in the morning (around dawn) some (at least six) of Jesus' female followers went to the tomb intending to put spices on the body. However, some time before they arrived at the tomb an angel had rolled back the stone and sat down on it, causing the guards to faint in shock. When the women reached the tomb they found the stone already rolled away, and they went inside where they saw an angel who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. They felt a mixture of fear and joy, and ran to tell the disciples what had happened without telling anyone else on the way. As they were running Jesus suddenly appeared to them. They recognised Him and worshipped Him. Meanwhile the guards went to the Jewish leaders, who bribed them and told them to false rumour that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body.

2. Peter and John ran to the tomb, Jesus appeared to Mary

[Luke 24:12; John 20:3-18]

When they received the news from the women, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John reached the tomb first but Peter was first to go inside. Peter saw the strips of linen Jesus had been buried in, and went off alone. Although we don't read in the Gospels exactly when, sometime shortly after this Jesus appeared personally to Peter. Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb with Peter and John and stayed there after they left. She saw a man in the garden and, at first (perhaps because her sight was blurred by her tears), did not recognise that it was Jesus. Then Jesus spoke her name, and she recognised Him.

3. Jesus appeared to two disciples on the Road to Emmaus

[Luke 24:13-35]

Luke tells us the story of two disciples who were leaving Jerusalem for the town of Emmaus on the Sunday, when they met a stranger on the road. They spoke to him about Jesus' death and he explained how the Old Testament pointed to the fact that the Messiah had to suffer. They later realised it was Jesus, and ran back to the city to tell the eleven disciples. By this time Jesus had already appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34).

4. Jesus appeared to the apostles

[Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-31]

After the two disciples arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to the eleven remaining disciples, but on this occasion one of them, Thomas, was not there. When the other disciples told Thomas they had seen Jesus he did not believe them at first. However, one week later Jesus again appeared to the disciples, this time with Thomas present. Thomas believed now, and made an amazing statement, calling Jesus "My Lord and my God". Jesus commended Him for realising this, accepting His worship. Jesus appeared to the apostles many times over a forty day period before He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3).

Evidence for the resurrection

1. Jesus really died

- a) *Medical evidence* (John 19:31-37) – the Roman soldiers were experts in executing people by crucifixion. If they wanted to speed up death they would break the victim's legs, making it impossible for them to breathe. In Jesus' case they didn't have to do this, as He was already dead. However, to be sure of this, the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear. The mixture of blood and clear fluid that flowed out shows that he must have pierced Jesus' heart.
- b) *Pilate's investigation* (Mark 15:44-45) – Pilate ensured that Jesus was really dead before releasing the body to Joseph. Roman soldiers would be very careful to be accurate in this case.

2. The tomb was empty

If it had not been empty, the enemies of Jesus could easily have proved that He had not risen by showing people the body or the sealed tomb. Instead, they came up with an excuse that the disciples had stolen the body (see Matthew 28:11-15). This, of course, was impossible as the tomb was sealed and guarded, and the terrified disciples, who were in hiding, would have been unlikely to risk death to steal a dead body.

3. The Christians claimed the resurrection was true from the very beginning

The resurrection was not a late addition to the message of the Christians. It was something they depended on from the very beginning in their preaching about Jesus. You can see this in Peter's first message about Jesus (Acts 2:24), and it is also clear from I Corinthians 15:3-8, where Paul quotes a very early Christian statement that included the resurrection and sightings of Jesus as a central belief of Christians.

4. There were many witnesses who saw Jesus alive

In I Corinthians 15:6, Paul says that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time, many of them still alive at the time when he was writing. This claim could easily have been investigated and disproved if it was not true. These could not have been hallucinations, as it is impossible for over 500 people to have the same hallucination at one time, and Jesus was able to eat a drink and be touched by the disciples, proving that He really did have a physical body. These witnesses really did believe that they had seen Jesus alive. Another fact from the record helps to prove that these stories were not invented, namely the fact that the first witnesses were women. In the culture of that day women could not be witnesses in court, as they were not trusted to give reliable evidence. No one who was making up a story would depend on the witness of women.

5. The transformation of the disciples

After the death of Jesus the disciples were terrified and went into hiding. Only a few weeks later they were on the streets of Jerusalem telling everyone that Jesus had risen from the dead. Within the next 30 years, almost every one of them was arrested and executed for being Christians and telling people about Jesus. Even when faced with torture and death they still held firmly to their claim that Jesus was alive. What caused this amazing change in the disciples? They had nothing to gain from dying for a false message!

6. The transformation of sceptics

Not everyone automatically believed the news about Jesus' resurrection. Thomas (one of the twelve disciples), for example, required personal proof (John 20:24-29). More amazing, however, was the transformation of a man called Saul (or Paul) who was an enemy of Christians. He became one of the greatest leaders of the Christian church because he claimed to have seen the risen Jesus (see *Part 19*).

7. The spread of Christianity

The amazing success of the spread of Christianity despite opposition, initially from the Jewish leaders and later from the Roman Empire, is evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Even today when a life is transformed by the Christian message it is evidence for the resurrection – that Jesus is alive and working today in the lives of people!

Jesus gives His mission to the apostles and ascends to Heaven

Some time after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew records this in Matthew 28:16-20. Jesus gave a special command to the apostles – to make followers for Him from every nation on earth by baptising them and teaching them His words. He also made three special claims about Himself:

- **All authority has been given to Him** (verse 18)
- **He is equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit**, so that people are baptised in all three names (verse 19)
- **He will be with His disciples always** – this refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit (verse 20)

Only Luke tells us about the final occasion when Jesus met the apostles. It was near Jerusalem 40 days after He had died (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-11). Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come so that they would have power to witness for Him, and then He was lifted up into the sky and disappeared. Angels told the disciples that He would come again one day just as He had left. In *Module 3* of this series we will see how the New Testament records the spread of the message about Jesus and the Kingdom of God under the leadership of the apostles, and how it promises that Jesus will return one day to finally bring in God's Kingdom in its fullness.

The importance of the Resurrection for Christians

The resurrection is central to the Christian faith. In I Corinthians 15:3-19 the Apostle Paul writes about this. The resurrection has implications for past, present and future:

PAST: Everything that Jesus taught was true. He is the Son of God, and we must listen to Him. The resurrection was the ultimate "miraculous sign" proving Jesus' teaching. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead proves that Jesus really did pay the full price for sins and that the power of death is defeated. Christians can have the eternal life that Jesus promised because He is alive forever.

PRESENT: Jesus is alive today to be trusted and we can have a personal living relationship with God through Him. Christians do not have a dead leader, but One who is alive forever. No other religion can claim this!

FUTURE: All Christians who die will also be raised to life in the future. We have hope for eternal life because Jesus is the "*resurrection and the life*" (John 11:25).

If Jesus is alive, the Kingdom of God really is here now, and we must turn from our sin and trust in Him!

Key Lesson: Jesus rose from the dead and is alive forever to save people who trust in Him

The resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact, and the most amazing event in the history of mankind. It proves that His teaching was true and that His death really paid the full price for sin. Because He rose again Jesus is alive today and is able to save those who trust in Him, to share His eternal life with us and to bring us into a new relationship with God.