

Week 4 – Discovering Jesus

Jesus' Life

Several independent, non-Christian writers confirm that a Jewish man known as Jesus of Nazareth lived in the Holy Land, about 2000 years ago. They describe him as a teacher and a miracle-worker, who attracted a large following, and who was eventually executed on a cross by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

According to the Bible, Mary gave birth to Jesus while she was still a virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born not far from Jerusalem, in Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth, a town near Lake Galilee in northern Israel, with Mary and her husband Joseph, and his brothers and sisters.

When he was about 30 years' old, Jesus began his public life, preaching and teaching in Galilee towns and villages. He performed many miracles, mainly healing people.

Jesus was a friend to everyone, even people on the margins of society. Huge crowds would gather where he was working. But what he said and did also made him enemies, by challenging both the Roman and the Jewish authorities.

After three years, Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem, a very important centre for Roman government and for the Jewish religion, even though he knew how dangerous it would be. He was again greeted by large, enthusiastic crowds. He confronted the Jerusalem authorities and controversially claimed that his own authority came directly from God.

Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples (Judas Iscariot) and arrested. He was completely innocent, and his trials were a mockery. He refused to defend himself. Jesus was brutally tortured, and then executed by crucifixion, his hands and legs nailed to a wooden cross, giving him a long, cruel, agonising death.

Amazingly, his friends and followers soon became convinced that Jesus was alive again. Christians believe that Jesus is still alive today.

Jesus' Teaching

Jesus used stories – parables – to put across much of his teaching. His central message is about the 'kingdom of God' – living our lives in the presence of God, and letting ourselves be ruled by God in everything.

God's kingdom is based on **love**. God is filled with love for each one of us. He wants us to love him in return. And he wants us to love and forgive other people – everyone, even our enemies. To live solely for others. Like Jesus did.

If we reject God, and refuse to live as he wants, God will judge us harshly. Jesus urges us to turn to God now, and to ask for forgiveness. He will welcome us with open arms. He will answer our prayers. If we believe and trust in God, he promises that we too will have eternal life.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the ***Son of God*** – part of the Trinity – God himself. He was just as human as we are. But he was so totally filled with the Spirit of God that his whole being *was* God – he had no “self” apart from God.

Why Jesus Died

Jesus claims to have died so that our sins can be forgiven. What does this mean?

“Sin” describes how the world has become ***separated from God***. So much of what is wrong results from our failure to love God, and to love one another, in the way that Jesus showed us. When we talk about sins, we mean both things which are wrong with our own lives, and things which are wrong with society as a whole.

How can we ever expect God to forgive us for all this? We may be genuinely sorry, and want to make a new start, but how can we ever make amends for all our sins?

This is why Jesus chose to die. He chose to take our place, to make amends on our behalf, to suffer instead of us. He wanted to free us from the sense of guilt which would make it impossible for us to feel forgiven. In this extraordinary way, Jesus proved that there are no limits to God’s love. No matter what we have done wrong, we can turn to God at any time and ask for forgiveness.

The Resurrection

Jesus was crucified on a Friday. Joseph of Arimathea was allowed to place Jesus’ dead body in his own family tomb. A large stone was used to block the entrance.

The next day was the Sabbath holy day. On Sunday, the tomb was found to be empty, the body gone. Jesus was alive! The Bible has numerous stories of Jesus appearing in person and talking with his followers, on that day and for some time afterwards, including one time when he was seen by more than 500 people.

During the last two thousand years there have been billions of people who have experienced Jesus Christ as a real and living presence in their lives, and who have become Christians as a result.

This is the truth of the resurrection – that the Spirit of Jesus is alive and with us, today and always.

Eternal Life for Us

If we believe that Jesus really is God, and that he really did return from death himself, then we must believe his other great promise to us as well – eternal life.

Our eternal life is the life which God shares with us. It doesn’t begin some time in the future, when we die. It begins now, as soon as we accept Jesus as our Saviour. That’s when we *really* start to live. A life which will never end.