

Jesus Christ: His nature and mission

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Jesus asked His disciples *Who do you say I am?* Matthew 16:15. The answer to this question is central to Christianity and is vital for our understanding of who Jesus is and why He came.

Peter's answer was: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Matthew 16:16. Jesus commended Peter for this answer saying that it was revealed not by man, *but by my Father in heaven. And I tell that you that you are Peter* (meaning rock), *and on this rock I will build my church.* Matthew 16:18.

The rock on which the Church is built is not Peter; it is **Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.**

The nature of Jesus Christ

In the Gospels Jesus is described as Son of God, and as Son of Man. This reflects His nature: truly God and truly human.

1. Jesus' name

One of the earliest Christian sayings was *Jesus Christ is Lord.* Romans 10:9.

Jesus

Iesous (Greek) or *Yeshua* (Hebrew) means "Yahweh is salvation". Jesus name shows He is the same person as Yahweh (meaning *the eternally existing One; the I am*), and that His role in coming into the world was to be the Saviour of the world. Luke 19:10, Hebrews 7:25, 1 Timothy 1:15.

In His childhood Jesus would have been as referred to as *Jesus bar Joseph* (son of Joseph), even though Joseph wasn't His father, and later *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Christ

Christos (Greek) means "the anointed one". It is the same as the Hebrew word for "Messiah" *masiah*. When the early Christians called Jesus "Christ" they were acknowledging that He was the expected Jewish Messiah, and that He was greater than any human being. Mark 8:27-30.

Lord - *kurios* (Greek) or *adonai* (Hebrew) means "owner, master, sovereign, Lord". This word was used in the Old Testament to replace God's personal name (YHWH) because the Jews considered this name too holy to be spoken.

So Jesus' title is *Lord*, indicating that He is the One to whom all honour, worship and obedience should be given; His name is *Jesus*, indicating that He is both God and Saviour, and His role is to be the anointed *Messiah* or *Christ*.

The four Gospels present Jesus in different ways:

- In *Matthew* He is the King of the Jews
- In *Mark* He is the suffering servant
- In *Luke* He is the Son of man
- In *John* He is the Son of God.

2. Jesus is truly God

The New Testament continuously declares that Jesus Christ is God:

- *In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was God.* John 1:1.
- Jesus is eternal. He is *the same yesterday, today and forever.* Hebrews 13:8.
- Jesus was responsible for creation. *Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.* John 1:3.
- Jesus holds all of creation together by His power. Jesus is *before all things and in Him all things hold together.* Colossians 1:17.
- Jesus gives life. *In Him was life and that life was the light of men.* John 1:4

- Jesus is called (among other names) the *Son of God*, Luke 22:70; the *Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End*, Revelation 22:12; the *Lord*, (Luke 2:11, Philippians 2:11; *Lord of all*, Acts 10:36; *Emmanuel, God with us*, Matthew 1:23; *God over all*, Romans 9:5.
- Jesus called Himself *I am*. John 8:58, and said *I and the Father are one*. John 10:30.
- Jesus did things only God could do. He *forgave sins*, Mark 2:5-7), granted *eternal life*, John 10:28; *knew* what was in peoples' hearts, John 2:24,25;
- Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, walked on water, commanded storms to be stilled, turned water into wine; multiplied loaves and fishes etc.
- Jesus rose from the dead. *He is risen*. Matthew 28:6.
- After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas called Him *My Lord and my God*. John 20:28.
- Jesus showed what God is like. *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* Hebrews 1:1-3
- The fullness of God dwelt in Jesus. *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* Colossians 2:9.
- Jesus will *judge the living and the dead*. 2 Timothy 4:1.
- Jesus is worthy of the same honour that is due the father. *...that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.* John 5:23.
- Jesus is to be worshipped. *Every knee shall bow to Him.* Philippians 2:11.

3. Jesus is truly human

The New Testament also shows that Jesus is *The Word became flesh*. John 1:14. He is fully human except that He is *without sin*. Hebrews 4:15.

This was an important truth for the early Christians, so much so that in his epistles John said denial of Jesus' humanity is *not from God*, and is *the spirit of the antichrist*. 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11.

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus living as a human being, just like us.

- Jesus was *born of a woman*, Galatians 4:4, and grew up as part of a family. He had a mother (Mary), a "step-father" (Joseph) and brothers. Matthew 13:55. He learnt and *grew in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and men*. Luke 2:52.
- Jesus *shared in our humanity*, and became *like us in every way*. Hebrews 2:14,17.
- Jesus called Himself the *Son of man*. Luke 19:10.
- Jesus had a human body. Even after His resurrection He said *Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see*. Luke 24:39.
- Jesus operated within normal human limitations. He got *tired*, John 4:6; was *hungry*, Matthew 21:18; got *thirsty*, John 19:28; suffered physical *agony*, Luke 22:44; was *tempted* Hebrews 4:15
- Jesus *prayed* to the Father. Luke 22:41-45.
- On the Cross Jesus recognised when He was separated from the father. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Matthew 27:46.
- Jesus *died* on the Cross. 1 Corinthians 15:3.

That Jesus is both God and man is a great mystery, but isn't it wonderful that *God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life?* John 3:16.

4. Jesus became a man at the incarnation

When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Galatians 4:4.

Jesus, the Son of God, was conceived in the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit and born as a human baby. God became man! See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-25. This is called the incarnation.



Philippians 2:5-11 describes what happened at the incarnation. It is so important that we will examine it verse by verse.

Who, being in very nature God...

Jesus had (and has!) the very nature of God. The word for 'nature' is *morphe*. It means *form* or *essential character* so Jesus was God in His character and nature. The word 'being' is in the present continuous tense so it indicates that Jesus was, is, and always will be God in His nature. The word *morphe* does not relate to how the inner nature is expressed outwardly in terms of appearance. So before He was born Jesus had the nature of God; while He was a man He had the nature of God, and now that He is in heaven He has the nature of God. Jesus is God!

did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing...

Jesus always had *equality with God*. He did not seek to retain this but laid it down when He became a man. He willingly adopted a manner of existence that was different from His Father's, ie. that of both God and man. This is the *kenosis* of Christ. *Kenosis* is the act of emptying, making nothing, or making void.

taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Jesus took on (*labon* - added to) *human likeness*. In doing so He did not lay aside His "Godness" but added to it. He added the *very nature (morphe* - essential character) of a man and was made in *human likeness (schema* - outward appearance or status). So Jesus who was (and is) God took on the external appearance and status of a man and in His essential nature became a servant. The word for servant is *doulos* - a slave; or one who serves others. Wow! The Almighty God willingly became a servant of us all!

Jesus was made in the likeness (*homoiomati*) of sinful men, Romans 8:3. While He was fully human in His nature, He was not exactly like us humans because He was without sin. Hebrews 4:15. (If Jesus was exactly like us the word *eikon* - exactly like, would have been used rather than *homoiomati* - likeness). Jesus had a fully divine nature and a fully human nature - yet was without sin.

The church council that met in Chalcedon in A.D. 451 produced one of the most complete statements of this doctrine. It reads in part: *"Our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human ... Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, manifested in two natures without any confusion, change, division or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person"*.



And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.

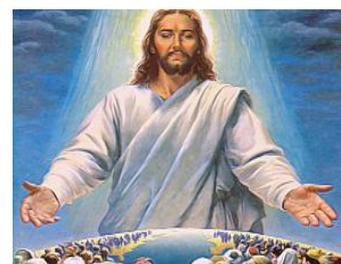
Jesus, as a man, humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the Father's will. Hebrews 5:8. This humbling was even to the point of laying down His life and dying on the Cross. To die on a cross was the ultimate shame in Roman society yet Jesus willingly did this for us. It showed just how much He loves us, and how submissive He was to the Father's will.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God can exalt whoever He wishes. 1 Samuel 2:7, and humility is always the way to greatness. Matthew 18:4, 23:12. God exalted Jesus because He willingly humbled Himself and became obedient to the Father's will. The word for exalted is *hyperyposen*. It means super-exalted.

God super-exalted Jesus through His resurrection and His ascension into heaven. Jesus is now glorified, honoured, worshipped and exalted. He has the name that is above any other name. He is Lord of everything in heaven and earth, and every knee must bow before Him and every tongue acknowledge that He is Lord.

What a privilege to know Jesus, and to spend our lives on earth and in eternity exalting and honouring Him!



5. Jesus is the word become flesh

The first 14 verses of John's Gospel are 'one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man'. (Barclay). They describe how *the word became flesh*.

To understand these verses and their importance we need to understand the circumstances of John's gospel, when they were written around AD90.

1. Most Christians were from a Gentile/Greek background

The Church had begun in Judaism and most of its first members were Jews. John's Gospel was written about 60 years after Jesus died. By then the Church had moved from its Jewish foundation and had spread throughout the Roman/Greek world. Christians were being strongly influenced by the Gentile culture they had grown up in, and lived in every day. Christianity needed to clearly state its essential truths so they would be meaningful in that culture.

2. There were strongly held philosophies (including philosophies about God)

a. The concept of logos (word, reason, intelligence)

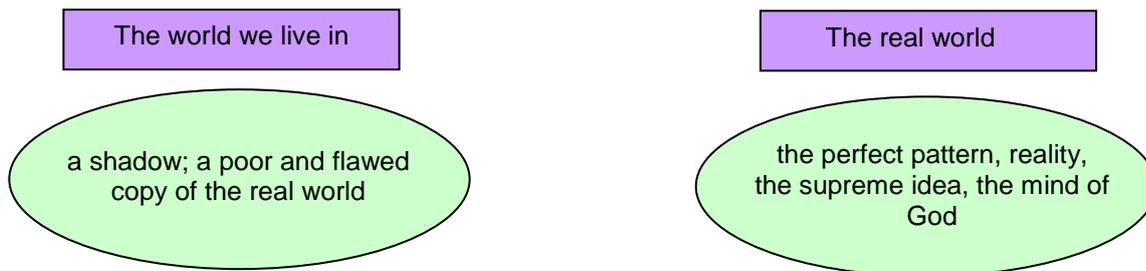
To the **Greek** the Word of God meant the *reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling mind and wisdom of God*. The *logos* is behind everything that happens. Why is there night/day? How were we made? Why do things happen as they do? How can we know right from wrong? Easy! The *logos* of God. The *logos* pervades all things; makes sense of the world, and keeps everything in its proper order.

To the **Jew** a word wasn't just a sound. It was something with an independent existence. It was powerful and did things. Blessings were conferred by words. Names had meanings and the meanings had power. Also God was seen to act through His Word. By His Word God created the world and everything in it. By His Word God gives life and light. God is His Word.

Both Jew and Greek recognised that it was the Word of God that made everything, sustains everything and makes sense of life. So John says, "If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He shows us God's mind, reason, intelligence, thoughts and being. He has always been; He has always been with God; He created everything; He is God. The mind of God became a person! Jesus is the *logos*!"

b. The concept of reality

The Greeks believed there were two worlds:



The big question was *How can we move from the shadow to the reality?* John says: "Jesus is the reality! Look to Him, know Him! Jesus is the *logos* (mind/reason/ intelligence) of God. All of God's fullness dwells in Him. Everything Jesus says and does enables us to see into the reality of God".

The Greek word for 'reality' is *alethinou* and for 'truth' is *alethes*. Reality and truth are the same thing! John often calls Jesus the true/real *xxxx* (God, bread, vine, judge etc). The message is that in Jesus alone there is reality and truth in a world of shadows, copies and imperfection. *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No-one comes to the Father but by Me.* John 14:6.

And you will know the truth (reality) and the truth (reality) will make you free. John 8:32

3. People were searching

People were searching for meaning and purpose in life. What is life all about? Where can I find meaning for my life? John shows that Jesus is the answer to these questions: *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* John 20:31.

The fullness of God (mind, reason, intelligence, thoughts and being) became human. We can see Him. We can know Him! He is the way to life! To the Greeks this was almost unbelievable. They believed that the body was evil. It was a prison containing our souls and confining our spirits. Yet John says the *Word became flesh* (*sarx*, the word used to describe our fleshly fallen nature). We could see God! He had become a man in Jesus. He experienced what we experience. He knows! He cares! He understands.

And what is He like? *Full of grace* (in the way He lived and lives) *and truth* (in what He said and says). In other words Jesus was fully human and in His humanity showed that we humans can live as God intended (in relationship with Him).

After His resurrection Jesus was *taken up into heaven* Luke 24:52, and is now *seated at the right hand of God*. Colossians 3:1. He has sent the Holy Spirit to give us *power* and sent us to be His witnesses in all parts of the earth. Acts 1:8. One day Jesus will return. *Yes, I am coming soon*. Revelation 22:20. And then *He will reign forever and ever*. Revelation 11:15 as *King of kings and Lord of lords*. Revelation 19:16.

4. Heresies were emerging within the Church

Gnosticism

Within its first 50 or 60 years the Church had developed a number of heresies. The main heresy that John needed to address was **Gnosticism**. It said that God was good and matter was evil, so God could have nothing to do with this world. The world was created by emanations of God, far from Him so He wasn't corrupted by His creation. People can know God is by working their way through levels of special knowledge (gnosis) and Jesus was seen as being one of the ways this special knowledge could be attained. This led some to believe that Jesus was a sort of spiritual emanation from God. Others (the Docetists) said Jesus had no body (because the body was seen to be evil); He was like a phantom and just seemed to be a man. That's why John says strongly *The word was God, and The word became flesh*.

The Arian controversy

- Around 300AD the Arian controversy split the Church. The Arian concept of Christ was that Jesus, the Son of God, did not always exist, but was created by - and is therefore distinct from and inferior to - God the Father. This is often the basis for non-trinitarian views of Jesus.
- After Emperor Constantine died the Roman Empire was split into east and west with the western (Roman) Church believing Jesus was fully God, and the eastern (Constantinople) Church being Arian.
- The Nicene Creed was written in 325AD, in an attempt to unify the Church and was revised in 381AD.
- The Trinitarian view (as in the Nicene Creed) became accepted in the Western and Eastern Churches (and later in Protestant Churches), but Arian views are still around.

Here's what the Nicene Creed says about Jesus:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Nicene Creed 325AD, revised 381AD

So.....

- Jesus Christ is Lord
- Jesus is the Jewish Messiah
- Jesus is the Son of God and truly God
- Jesus is the Son of man and truly human
- Jesus is the logos of God become flesh
- Jesus is the Saviour of the world
- Jesus is the One to whom every knee shall bow
- Jesus is King of kings and Lord of Lords.



Discussion questions

Who do you say Jesus is? What does He mean to you?

Explain what happened in the kenosis of Christ by referring to the key Greek words in Philippians 2:5-11: *morphe, schema, labon, kenosis, homoiomati, doulos*. Use this to describe the nature of Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world; while He was on earth, and as He is now in eternity.

Why is it so important for Christians to believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man? What would be the implications on our faith if He wasn't fully God, or fully man? On what basis can we say that He is fully God and fully man?

Very soon after Jesus' resurrection philosophies began to emerge saying that Jesus wasn't fully God and fully man, and similar philosophies persist till this day. e.g. Gnosticism, Docetism, Arianism, Liberalism and Jehovah's Witnesses. Describe what these philosophies teach about Jesus' nature, and analyse their impact on history; on peoples' faith and on the growth of the Christian Church. How would you respond to the teachings of these philosophies?

How was Jesus able to do miracles? Include a consideration of whether it because He was God, and whether it was through the power of the Holy Spirit within Him?

Examine the statements in the Nicene Creed which refer to Jesus. What are the implications of each statement for Christian faith today?

We shall now explore Jesus' mission: why He came to the earth.

The mission of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus came to bring life

The Gospels describe many different reasons why Jesus came. Here are some of them from Matthew's Gospel. The other Gospels give similar reasons.

Jesus came:

- to save people from their sins. Matthew 1:21.
- to be the shepherd of Israel. Matthew 2:6.
- to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Matthew 3:11.
- to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23.
- to heal the sick and set free the demonized. Matthew 4:23,24.
- to fulfill the law and prophets. Matthew 5:17.
- to forgive sins. Matthew 9:6.
- to call sinners to repentance. Matthew 9:13.
- to give rest to the weary and burdened. Matthew 11:28.
- to be Lord of the Sabbath. Matthew 12:8.
- to proclaim justice to the nations. Matthew 12:18.
- to teach about the Kingdom of God. Matthew 13.
- to warn about the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:11.
- to die on the Cross and rise from the dead. Matthew 20:19.
- to give His life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28.
- to bring in a new commandment of love. Matthew 22:38.
- to describe signs of the end of the age. Matthew 24.
- to fulfill the Father's will by suffering on the Cross. Matthew 26:39.
- to rise from the dead. Matthew 28:6.
- to give the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20.

Jesus Himself described His mission as follows:
"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18,19.

Ultimately all of these are about bringing life. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should have eternal life.* John 3:16. *I am come that they may have life and have it to the full.* John 10:10.

And the wonderful thing is that Jesus totally fulfilled His mission! He was able to say to the Father “*I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave me to do*”. John 17:4.

2. Jesus came to fulfill the Law

Jesus came not to *abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them.* Matthew 5:17. Everything in the Old Testament Law – including all of its requirements – was fulfilled in Jesus.

Because Jesus has fulfilled the Law it no longer has any relevance for Christians. Instead Jesus gave us a *new commandment to love the Lord, our neighbours and ourselves*, and obey what God says for us to do. See Matthew 22:37-40 This new commandment encompasses all that the Old Testament Law entailed and it is positive and freeing. Rather than being bound up in legalism about what we are not to do, we are to be led by the Spirit and to live a life of love. This will make our lives fruitful, positive, righteous and *free indeed.* John 8:36.

Many sections of the New Testament deal with Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law, as it was a big issue for the early Christians. Some thought Christians should still be under the Law so Paul and the other New Testament writers expanded on Jesus teaching to show that Christians were free from the demands of the Law, because these demands have been fully met in Christ. Righteousness is by faith in Christ not by trying to keep the Law.

See Romans Chapters 1-11, especially Chapter 8; and 13:8-10; Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34,35; John 14:15-27; Matthew 5:17-20, 22:37-39; Galatians Chapters 2:11- 5:26; Ephesians 2:14-18, Colossians 2:6-23; Hebrews 10:1-18; James 2:8-13; 1 John 3 etc.

3. Jesus came to make atonement for sin

Jesus died on the Cross to make atonement for sin. This enabled Him to save all who would have faith in Him. *I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes – first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written “the righteous shall live by faith”.* Romans 1:16,17.

Let’s explore why Jesus had to die on the Cross, how this dealt with our sin, and how it enables us to be saved.

God is holy

Holy means ‘separate’. God is separate from anything sinful. He has no sin in Him and can have no contact with sin. To do so would corrupt His very nature. *God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.* 1 John 1:5.

God created people for fellowship

God created people so He could have fellowship with Him, and bring Him pleasure. *For His pleasure we are and were created.* Revelation 4:11. As part of this God gave us a free will so we could willingly choose to love Him. Without free will we would just be robots and would not be able to give God pleasure.

Sin entered at the fall

At the fall Adam and Eve exercised their free will and chose to disobey God, and live their lives without Him. They chose to live without God and so became sinners. The Hebrew word for sin *hamartia* means ‘missing the mark; ‘falling short of God’s standard’ ie. Himself. As a result of Adam and Eve’s sin, fellowship with God was lost and they were banished from the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve’s sinful nature was then passed on to their children. *Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.* Romans 5:12.

All people are sinners

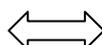
We all have a sinful nature. *All are under sin.* Romans 3: 9. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3: 23. As a result of our sinful nature we all carry out acts of sin and *have become filled with every kind of wickedness.* Romans 1:29.

God must destroy sin

God can have nothing to do with sin. If He did His very nature will be corrupted. That’s why *the wages of sin is death.* Romans 6:23. *The soul who sins is the one who will die.* Ezekiel 18: 4

So God had a dilemma!

God loves people and wants to fellowship with them



God can’t have anything to do with sin. People are sinners. Sinners must die.

God can only fellowship with people if they are righteous

God provided a way that people could be righteous so He could fellowship with them. The Greek word for "righteousness" is *dikaiosune* which means living or moving in the right way, measured against God's standard ie. Himself.

People tried to be righteous

- **by keeping the Law**

Unfortunately the Law just showed how sinful people are. No-one could meet its standards. *Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law; rather through the Law we become conscious of sin.* Romans 3: 20

- **by the death of a substitute (atonement)**

An animal was sacrificed and it died instead of the people. The *life of the flesh is in the blood* Leviticus 17:11, so blood had to be shed. When this happened the *wages of sin* was paid, and God's righteous anger at sin was appeased. Rather than being poured on the people, His anger was poured on the substitute. The sacrificial death of the substitute animal made atonement for the sins of the people, covering over their sins. The word *hilasterion* means "atonement; propitiation; appeasing of God's anger at sin; covering over of sin".

This led to legalism as people tried to keep the law, and to an extensive sacrificial system that needed to be continually repeated as no sacrifice made full atonement for the sins of the people. But it didn't work! No-one could keep the whole Law; the sacrifices were imperfect, and the sacrificial system had to be repeated over and over because the people kept on sinning. *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* Hebrews 10:4. These measures didn't deal with peoples' sinful nature, and couldn't bring about righteousness.

Jesus made atonement, once for all, through His perfect sacrifice on the Cross

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 1 Corinthians 5: 21.

- Jesus took our sin upon Himself and became sin.
- Jesus died in our place. He was the perfect sacrifice.
- Atonement was made, once for all: God's anger at sin was fully appeased. *God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement.* Romans 3:25. The *wages of sin* (death) were fully paid!



God declares us to be righteous in His sight

On the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross God declares us to be righteous in His sight. This is called "justification", and it is received by faith when we accept Jesus as Saviour. *But now a righteousness from God, apart from the Law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* Romans 3:21-24.

We are saved

When we accept Jesus as Saviour we are saved and become a child of God. *If you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* Romans 10:9.

We are saved by God's grace, not by our own works: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*" Ephesians 2:8.

When we are saved we are delivered from the power of sin and death; we have eternal life; we become God's children, and we are able to have a relationship with God. That's good news.

Ultimately salvation is about reconciliation. We, who once were enemies of God, have been reconciled back to relationship with God, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. *God reconciled us to Himself through Christ.* 2 Corinthians 5:18. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

We can have fellowship with God because we are righteous in Christ.

Standing in Christ

righteous, forgiven
perfect, free from sin

State in the world

saved, sinner (due to our sinful nature), sinful and often need to repent and seek forgiveness

Now when God looks at us He sees the finished work of Christ on the Cross. The blood has been shed; atonement has been made and we are righteous "in Christ". God can have fellowship with us and we can fellowship with Him.

Being "in Christ" is Paul's "magnificent obsession". Check out every time that the words "in Christ" and similar words (like "in Him", "in the Beloved", "in Christ Jesus") are used in the Epistles. You will be amazed at how central this is to what the New Testament teaches.

4. Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God

The "Kingdom of God" is the major message in the New Testament. Jesus initiated it; proclaimed it; taught about it and ushered it in. *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1:15. *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God because that is why I was sent."* Luke 4:43.

Jesus mission was more than just fulfilling the Old Testament Law and sacrificial system, and providing a way of salvation. He came to bring us into full relationship with Himself, now and in eternity.

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is all about our relationship with God as individuals and as part of the Body of Christ. We live fully under His Kingship and bring God pleasure by fulfilling His purposes for our lives. He is our Lord and our God. When we are in the Kingdom Jesus is King of every area of our lives. He is Lord.

The Kingdom of God is not a thing or a place. It is a condition of relationship in which God is King.

At the personal level the Kingdom of God is:

- **within you**

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20, 21.



- **God's will for your life**

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10.

- **the most important thing in life**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Matthew 13:44-46. *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:33.

- **a condition of intimate fellowship with God**

At salvation we enter into **relationship** with God. We become His children and belong to Him. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.* 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18, 19



After salvation we can have a life of **fellowship** with God (ie. Kingdom living!).

Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. John 3:3-5. ...and for your pleasure they were and are created. Revelation 4:11. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1:9

- **what gives meaning and purpose in life**

Kingdom living is all about being what God wants us to be and doing what God wants us to do. We live for His pleasure and glory.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-14.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10

- **a condition in which we are living in righteousness, peace and joy**

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17.

- **eternal**

The Kingdom of God is not just for now; it is for eternity.

When Jesus returns He will bring in an eternal Kingdom. The Old and New Testaments both point forward to the *Day of the Lord* when God's plan for His world is fulfilled. Jesus will return and bring in the full expression of the Kingdom of God. This will be *the year of the Lord's favor*; the culmination of God's purposes; the wrapping up of history in Christ and the beginning of eternity with Jesus for those who are part of God's family. Heaven!



The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. Revelation 11:15.

And we will live forever with Him, fulfilling God's eternal purpose to have everything under one Head: Jesus Christ.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Ephesians 1:9,10

Jesus will have completed His mission..... and the Kingdom of God will last for eternity. Hallelujah!

So..... Jesus mission was to:

- bring life to those who were living in darkness because they were out of relationship with God.
- fulfill the Law and bring in a new way of love.
- make atonement for sin, enabling all who accept Him to be saved and have a relationship with God because they are righteous "in Him".
- proclaim and usher in the Kingdom of God.



Discussion questions

What was Jesus mission in coming to the earth? What did He do to fulfill this mission? Was Jesus' mission fulfilled?

In the Old Testament there were two ways that sinful people could relate to a holy God: by keeping the Law and by the sacrificing of animals. Show how Jesus fulfilled both of these. Why is His way described as "better" in the Book of Hebrews?

Why did Jesus have to die on the Cross?

On what basis are Christians able to have fellowship with God?

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? Read through the first three chapters of Ephesians and identify all of the times that "in Christ" (or its equivalent) is used. What do you learn from this?

Read through 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. What does this teach you about reconciliation with God? Explain the importance of 'righteousness' in this, and how we can become righteous.

What is the Kingdom of God and what is it like? How did Jesus usher in the Kingdom of God? How can we be sure that we are in the kingdom of God? What will the kingdom of God be like after Jesus comes again?

What is your mission in life? Jesus fulfilled His mission. How are you fulfilling yours?