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Short Course on Christian Faith and Theology
The Meaning of Jesus' Life



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Meaning of Jesus?

- "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." (St Athanasius)


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Christianity

- Incarnation = God become human (flesh).
- Why does God become human?
- Complete 'yes'.
- Radically alive.
 - self-emptying and self-giving.
- The 'no' and 'maybe'.

Salvation History

- God creates the universe (Creation).
- Enters into relationship with his creatures (Covenant).
- Becomes part of the world (Incarnation).
- In order to make a radical offer & enable humans to become part of God's life.
- God = eternal life of love, beyond time & space ["God is love." (1 Jn 4:8)].

 theology and philosophy

Fulfilment of the Covenant

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. **But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.** No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; *for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*" (Jer 31:31-34)

 theology and philosophy

Who is Jesus?

 theology and philosophy

Jesus 

- What would God look like?
- How to breach the gap between Creator and creature...
 - especially in a sinful, violent world that rejects God?

 theology and philosophy

“...though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:6-11)

 theology and philosophy

Jesus 

- God incarnate.
 - Mystery of the eternal God as a human.
- God crucified and dead.
 - Mystery of God-man dying and humans killing him.
- God risen.
 - God-man rising: Death is not final.
- God ascended.
 - Divinity and humanity united eternally.

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So who is this Jesus?

- The question of Jesus' identity.
- Central to the Gospels
- Is this the Messiah?
- Is this God?

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Jesus as Lord and Christ

- Ministry focused on the Kingdom of God.
- Kingdom centred on Jesus.
 - Power and violence v. love.
- Jesus is his self-giving love (cf. Mt 25).
 - Entering history to relate with humanity equally and fully.

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"...Christ ... is not man for himself but essentially man for others; it is precisely his complete openness that makes him the man of the future. **The man for himself, who wants to stand only in himself, is then the man of the past whom we must leave behind us in order to strive forward. In other words, this means that the future of man lies in 'being-for'.** This fundamentally confirms once again what we recognized as the meaning the talk of sonship and, before that, as the meaning of the doctrine of three persons in one God, namely a reference to the dynamic, 'actual' existence, **which is essentially openness in the movement between 'from' and 'for'.**" (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 1990, 179-80).

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Jesus as Son of God 

- “The Son”
 - Complete openness and surrender to God (Being-from).
 - Complete openness and self-giving (Being-for).
- Jesus revealing the Kingdom of God in his person.
 - “Abba”-Son dialogue
 - God as fully alive, beyond death & violence (cf. John 8).
- Mark (chs 1, 8 & 15) = confrontation.

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Mark 8:29-35 

And he asked them, "But **who do you say that I am?**" Peter said to him in reply, "**You are the Messiah.**"

Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days.

He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "**Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.**"

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.

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Why does Jesus die and rise? 

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The Climax of Creation and the Incarnation.

- God's way of living = victim.
- The distorted human way of living...
= violence and domination.

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The new covenant represents a new vision of God. It is not ratified and celebrated with blood of sacrifice or with any special religious act. **It is ratified by what is simply an act of love.** An act of love as bloody and horrible as any sacrifice, but first of all simply an act of ordinary love. The new covenant is ratified because Jesus accepted his dreadful death. **And he accepted it because he loved us, loved us enough to be close to us, to be close enough to be our victim, close enough to suffer the fate that we impose on love that threatens our world, our world based on lies and domination and fear, on anything except love. Jesus died because when we meet love, although we fool ourselves that we will like it, we in fact kill it** (H. McCabe, *God, Christ, and Us*, 86)

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If our human communities are characterised by death and violence – if no one is living a fully human life (saying 'yes') – **then in order for us to know love and change, someone had to live a life of complete love...**

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Crucifixion & Resurrection

- How is this confrontation resolved?
- In God's 'yes' to Jesus.
- In the Resurrection.
- In being approached by gratuitous forgiveness and love.

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Imagine what it is like to be approached by your forgiving victim. It is actually very difficult indeed to spend time thinking about being approached by our forgiving victim! What is it like to actually undergo being forgiven? We tend to try to resolve this by saying, "Oh, it's not being forgiven that matters. It's *forgiving*: I must forgive!" So we work ourselves up into a moral stupor, straining ourselves to "forgive the bastard!" It's very, very complicated. But in fact the Christian understanding is quite the reverse: it's because we are undergoing being forgiven that we can forgive; and we need to forgive in order to *continue* undergoing *being* forgiven. But remember: it's because we are approached by our victim, that we start to be undone. Or in Paul's language: "even though you were dead in your sins he has made you alive together in Christ." **Someone was approaching you even when you didn't realize there was a problem, so that you begin to discover, "Oh! So that's what I've been involved in."** (James Alison, *Undergoing God*, 64-5).

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...So if Jesus' life of love is really our purpose and fulfilment, then love has to be stronger than death or violence.

➤ **Love overcomes death.**

➤ **in history.**

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“...the Christian message is basically nothing else than the transmission of the testimony that **love has here broken through death and thus transformed fundamentally the situation of all of us.**”
(J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, p. 234).

Crucifixion and Resurrection

- The New Covenant in the heart.
 - Receiving & offering God’s love.
 - Confronting and transforming sin, evil and death.
 - As Crucified and Risen victim.
 - Uniting humanity and divinity.

Jesus

- Mission = Kingdom of God.
- Identity = Incarnate Son, Christ and Lord.
 - identity, teaching and action united.
- Drama/Action = Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection.
 - making God’s life fully present.
