

Jesus – his Nature, Life and Victory

When offering a prayer to God for his followers, Jesus declared: *“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”* (**John 17:3**). Knowing God and Jesus, His Son, is a matter of great importance: it concerns eternal life.

Later, when the Apostle Peter spoke about Jesus, he said: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (**Acts 4:12**).

The Bible provides the only reliable source of information about Jesus Christ, and we must open its pages to learn about him. One of the difficulties we face when approaching this subject is that many sincere people have very different views – hence the importance of going to the Bible. Some, who accept Christ as a historical figure, regard him as the natural son of Joseph and Mary. At the other extreme are those who believe the widely-held Doctrine of the Trinity. This regards Jesus as ‘God the Son’ who came down from heaven to be born as a human baby on earth and, after being put to death on the cross and rising to life again, returned to heaven in glory where he had been before. So, what must we ‘know’ about ‘Jesus Christ’?

Old Testament prophecies fulfilled

Neither of the views mentioned above is supported in the pages of scripture. The coming of Christ was foretold long in advance – indeed, in the earliest chapters of the Bible. In Genesis chapter 3, we find that the sentence of death was passed as a result of human sin. Yet, even at that dark moment in human history, God promised that He would send a Saviour who would overcome the power of sin (**Genesis 3:15**). That Saviour is Jesus – who finally came, several thousand years later.

Many other prophecies in the Old Testament foretold his coming. For example, when God made promises to King David, He spoke of the Saviour to come who would be both a son (descendant) of David and also the Son of God (**2 Samuel 7:12,14**). Later, the prophet Isaiah was told that *“a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (**Isaiah 7:14**). Immanuel is a title meaning, ‘God with us’ and the inspired Gospel writer Matthew says that this prophecy was fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus (**Matthew 1:23**). The New Testament gives us the name of the virgin: Mary. She was engaged to be married to Joseph who, while considering what to do about his fiancée’s pregnancy, received angelic reassurance:

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins’ (**Matthew 1:20, 21**).

In Luke chapter 1 we read of the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, announcing that she would give birth to the Saviour:

“You shalt conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David ... The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (**Luke 1:30-35**).

This helps us to understand what ‘God with us’ means. As God had promised long in advance, Jesus was both Son of God because God literally was his Father and he was a descendant of David in his natural line through the virgin Mary. Later, when Jesus was baptised, the Father in heaven expressed His approval by saying: *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (**Matthew 3:17**).

“I and my Father are one”

During his Ministry, Jesus was uniquely placed to reveal his Father to men and women. As John records: *“No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son ... he has declared him”* (**John 1:18**). Jesus was the manifestation of his Father – that is to say, in his life, his character and his teaching, he perfectly revealed to men and women the character and will of God. So, quite truthfully, Jesus said plainly: *“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do”* (**John 5:19**) and *“My Father is greater than I”* (**John 14:28**). So, when he also said *“He that has seen me has seen the Father”* (**John 14:9**), and *“I and my Father are one”* (**John 10:30**), he was not claiming equality with God. Rather, he was expressing the perfect unity of mind and purpose that had developed, and still exists, between the Father and the Son.

Not only did Jesus teach people “*as one having authority*” (**Matthew 7:29**), but his words were also supported by the power of God, enabling him to perform “*miracles and wonders and signs*” (**Acts 2:22**) during his Ministry – clear evidence that his words were true and that God was with His Son.

Writing to his young friend Timothy, the Apostle Paul declared: “*There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (**1 Timothy 2:5**). These words were written long after Jesus had ascended to heaven, so clearly Jesus had not resumed being some part of godhead! He was a man who had been glorified and given eternal life. When Paul wrote to believers in Corinth, referring to the time when God’s kingdom has been fully established he made the point that “when all things have been put under him, then will the Son himself be under him who put all things under him, so that God may be all in all” – conclusive proof that Jesus is not ‘part of a Godhead’, but the son of God who was born, who died and then was raised to eternal life by his Father. (**1 Corinthians 15:28**)

Made like us – flesh and blood

However, although Jesus was the Son of God, he was also a man – flesh and blood as we are. He is called in scripture the “Son of man”: he had a human mother, Mary. Through her, he is a descendant of the great King David on whose throne he is to sit. This will be when he returns to the earth to establish his Father’s kingdom.

The fact that Jesus had the same nature as ourselves is emphasised in scripture. The Apostle Paul tells us that, when the time had come, God’s Son was “*born of a woman*” (**Galatians 4:4**). We also read (of those Christ came to save) “*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same ...*” (**Hebrews 2:14**). There is a piling up of words in this verse to emphasise the point that Christ shared our nature. A few verses later we find this explanation: “*Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things of God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succour those that are tempted*” (**Hebrews 2:17, 18**).

This theme is expanded in chapter 4: “*Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, even Jesus the Son of God, let us be strong in our faith. For we have not a high priest who is not able to be touched by the feelings of our feeble flesh; but we have one who has been tested in all points as we ourselves are tested, but without sin*” (**Hebrews 4:14,15**). We all have to face temptation in our lives; we are often tempted to do things that are wrong in God’s sight. Jesus was also made like us; he knew what it was like to be tempted. But, whereas we so often give in to the temptation, he never did! As that verse in Hebrews says, he was “*without sin*”.

One in Christ

So, Jesus overcame temptation. Of his own free will, he chose to obey his Father in all things. Because he was sinless on the one hand, and yet on the other he was of our nature (flesh and blood – he was a true representative of mankind), he was able to be offered as a sacrifice for sin. He became obedient to the death of the cross (**Philippians 2:8**). But, being sinless himself, and a man of supreme faith in his Father, God raised him from the dead, never to die again. And God has said that we can receive forgiveness of our sins and can be reconciled to Him if we become associated with Christ – if we become Christ’s through water - by immersion. (see **Acts 2:22-38; Galatians 3:27, 28**)

The Life of Jesus

Let us think about it this way... The achievement of Jesus is far greater than that of any other person (and there have been some amazing things done through the centuries of human history). We read of exceptional responses to the circumstances of life of many people – and this helps to emphasise how great and important is what Jesus did. It is especially important to see the victory of Jesus in the context of his nature – as we have seen, he did not have any special advantage bestowed by ‘being part of God’

Now, let’s remind ourselves of the right approach to leading a life pleasing to God, particularly while facing challenges. There are times when our lives seem to be going well, when we are going along nicely and then we need to be reminded of our need for God and our need for self-sacrifice to serve our God. Then there are times when our lives are hard, when many things seem to go wrong and we struggle. Then, also, we need to be

reminded of our need for God and our need for self-sacrifice to serve God. A bit of a theme appears, to teach us that whenever things are good or bad we need to remember and think first of God; we need to pray always and remember that Jesus taught us that help will be given to those who truly worship and follow God and His Son.

3 Examples

When we think about people, some are good at planning big things, complex things involving many other people sometimes. Naaman the captain of the armies of the King of Syria was a leper. He was used to doing big, complex things and probably being praised for it. So when he was told that God could cure him of his leprosy he expected to do some great thing to earn it –but that was not what God wanted, he wanted his simple trust and humility. Not everyone is like Naaman; some people like to do lots of small things to help and sometimes these jobs are not even noticed and they prefer it that way. We are all different types of people but God has seen in each one of us some good thing that he can use to carry forward His purpose.

Now imagine that you have three years to do some great thing – you will need to get ready: to train, to prepare, and then be capable of doing it. How does that sound? Now think about Jesus: his whole life was a preparation for the work that he was to do for God, His Father, and the great thing that he had to accomplish. But to continue the example, there was a particular period of about three years, following his baptism, when he followed a structured approach to complete as much work as possible and prepare himself for the great task.

God wants willing workers and we will look at two examples of those who were ready and willing to serve:

“The word of the LORD was not yet revealed (to Samuel). Then the LORD called Samuel. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, Go, lie down: and, if He calls, you shall say, Speak, LORD; for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3) In fact Samuel said *“Here I am”*.

He didn’t say ‘why me?’, nor ‘why now?’ – he was simply ready to serve.

In the book of Ruth we discover the determination of the widow of Naomi’s dead son *“where you go, I will go; and where you live, I will live: your people shall be my people, and your God my God: Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried.” (Ruth 1)*

Ruth had learned from Naomi that God is good and that He is the only God and so she committed herself to serve Him for the whole of her life.

These examples are good illustrations that God wants willing workers and with these people he can carry forward His purpose in the earth. It is all about serving God in the small things of life, all day every day. This is the relationship which God wants to have with His people, where they constantly think about Him and want to serve Him better. God in turn constantly gives His attention to those that love and serve Him, and He looks after them all the days of their lives.

Jesus’ preparation began when we was old enough to understand the words of God. He studied them, learned them – and he lived them. In Luke 2, we read how Jesus was taken up to the Temple when he was 12 years old. He was *‘found in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.’* The boy Jesus had been learning about God and His ways ever since he could listen, could speak, could understand. Imagine his joy at being surrounded by men who could talk with him about these precious things; he could ask them questions and to their great surprise he could answer theirs. His preparation was from a very early age. As he sat and talked with the learned men discussing spiritual things, he would have seen around him in the Temple the moneychangers and the sellers of sacrificial offerings, all calling their wares and defrauding the people by overcharging them. Little wonder that eventually, when he came back to the Temple twenty years later as a man, and they still had not learned God’s ways, he would overturn their tables and chase them from God’s House.

The Victory of Jesu

Each one of us, when we commit our lives to Jesus through immersion, also commits to fight against sin in our flesh. Sin is disobedience to God, the actions of our human nature. We shall all fail. no matter how hard we try (and we must try hard), but Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. How does he know us better?

“For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Just like us, he was tempted each day of his life in all the many ways that men and women are tempted; and yet we are told that, in all his life, he was without sin. He never gave in to it, he never had to repent of it or regret it. The victory of Jesus is seen here in its first part: he conquered sin himself and was not subject to it. He did not serve sin, but served only God and his fellow man. Now this would have been a remarkable achievement for any man – to overcome sin in himself. No other man had ever achieved it, the Law of Moses condemned any man who had transgressed it in any way and as a result the Law could not save anyone, just teach them a better way. But remarkable as it was, this great task could only save one man, Jesus the man who was sinless.

However, God had prepared His son to fulfil an even greater task. ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23): the just reward of all those who disobey God is to have the breath of life removed from them. In God’s mercy He often allows men and women to lead long lives and do much good service to Him, but He also allows men and women to lead long lives totally ignoring Him and going their own ways. But the sentence passed upon all who have sinned is that they will die.

Jesus, the first sinless man, broke the mould. The sentence of death was passed upon all men because they have sinned. But Jesus was a man who did no sin, so by the justice of the sentence he should not die. Yet the authorities were determined that this preacher who showed them in such a bad light and undermined their authority and power over the people must die.

“you seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and you do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: Abraham did not do this.”

(John 8:37-40)

This is how Jesus, a sinless man, was condemned to die: by the lies and falsehoods of malicious men. God only had a place in their lives so they might profit themselves and not serve Him or other people. In his perfection and by this false sentence of death, Jesus was able to fulfil that greatest task of all: to take upon him all the sins of the world and, by his own willing death, put away the power of death over poor weak sinners. By his perfection and obedience he conquered death, not only for himself, but for all those who will seek to follow his example.

“Now I say this, my brothers, that it is not possible for flesh and blood to have a part in the kingdom of God; and death may not have a part in life. I am giving you the revelation of a secret: we will not all come to the sleep of death, but we will all be changed. In a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet: for at that sound the dead will come again, free for ever from the power of death, and we will be changed. For this body, which comes to destruction, will be made free from the power of death, and the man who is under the power of death will put on eternal life. But when this has taken place, then that which was said in the scriptures will come true: Death is overcome by life. O death, where is your power? O death, where are your pains? The pain of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law. But praise be to God who gives us strength to overcome through our Lord Jesus Christ. For this cause, my dear brothers, be strong in purpose and unmoved, ever giving yourselves to the work of the Lord, because you are certain that your work is not without effect in the Lord.” **(1 Corinthians 15:50-58)**

This is the victory of Jesus. The victory over sin and death that he has achieved for himself in obedience to his Father’s will. The same victory over sin and death is offered, in God’s mercy, to us – in God’s Kingdom when it is established on the earth. When Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at his Father’s right hand nearly two thousand years ago, a promise was given that he would return: *“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”* **(Acts 1:11)**. When he returns, he will reward those who have been faithful to him with eternal life. That hope, that victory, is available to each one of us!

One man, one God, one victory, one hope.

Footnote: “Before the foundation of the world”

There is no indication at all that Jesus pre-existed before his birth, even though at first reading there may be some passages of scripture that appear to suggest it. Some prominent preachers push this idea. Take, for example, the words of Jesus’ prayer: “*And now, O Father, glorify me with your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was ... for you loved me before the foundation of the world*” (**John 17:5, 24**). How could God have loved His Son and given him honour before the world was – before he existed as a person? Scripture makes it plain that God is not bound by time as we are. He is said to be “*from everlasting ... to everlasting*” (**Psalms 41:13**). To God, what we call past, present and future are equally vivid. Our consciousness is limited to the present; we have imperfect memories of the past, and know nothing of the future, apart from what has been revealed in scripture. God is presented in the Bible as a wise architect (**Hebrews 11:10**) who foresaw the glory of His completed plan for the earth right from the beginning. So, the Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus Christ was “*foreordained [foreknown] before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*” (**1 Peter 1:20**). The Apostle John describes Jesus in the Book of Revelation as “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (**Revelation 13:8**). He was actually slain some two thousand years ago – and there were thousands of years of human history before that! This verse is expressing God’s foreknowledge. Right from the beginning God knew what His Son would be like. Long before he was born, God foresaw that His only Son would have to be “*a Lamb slain*” as a sacrifice for sin. In just the same way, He foresaw the ultimate glory of His Son and all that would be accomplished through him. That is why God could glorify and love Jesus in advance.