**Series 3 - Getting to Really Know God...**

Hi, friends, and welcome to this lesson! Any retelling of the life of Jesus Christ—especially a short one like this—falls far short of doing it justice. But if you are not familiar with the facts of Jesus' life and ministry, this lesson will be an introduction that hopefully will whet your appetite to learn more. Understanding Christ is the foundation for understanding true Christianity, which is believing and living by Christ's teachings and striving to imitate His perfect life.

If you already have a good understanding of Christ's life and teachings, this lesson should be an inspiring review and overview of that most precious understanding. It may also help prepare you to know how to explain to others our purpose in life and what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

For modern-day disciples of Christ who love Him above all else, it's always a joy to read and meditate on His wonderful life and teachings.

**Lesson 5: The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ**

*To be a true disciple of Christ means not only to be an admirer and follower, but also to obey and imitate Him. May this lesson help you toward that goal.*

The following account from John 20:19-21, 24-29 about "doubting Thomas" has a great lesson for all of us:

"Then, the same day [the day after Jesus rose from the dead] at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you…'

"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'

"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'

"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'

"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'

"Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

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**The Sources of Information About Jesus' Life and Ministry**

The primary sources of information about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the first four books of the New Testament, which are called the Gospels. Other sources are the many prophecies in the Old Testament about the future Messiah and the New Testament books in which the apostles explain many things about Christ and His teachings.

Why are there four Gospels instead of just one? First, the Gospels are not purely biographies. Each of the four authors are describing what he considers the most spiritually significant elements of Jesus' life and teachings. Of course, each author was inspired by God through His Holy Spirit.

There are no real contradictions among the four accounts. The four different perspectives complement each other and help to fill out the whole picture of His perfect life. Therefore, there is harmony, continuity and unity among the four accounts. It's profitable to combine the perspectives into an overall view, but it's also interesting and profitable to focus on one perspective at a time.

Summarizing the particular focus of each author can be challenging, but here is one simplified approach: Matthew announces Jesus as King, Mark presents Him as Servant, Luke focuses on Him as Man and John highlights Him as God. Jesus is our perfect model in each of those roles.

**What are the meanings of Jesus' primary names and titles?**

Matthew 1:21  
"And she [Mary] will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:23  
"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

John 1:41  
He [Andrew] first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

Luke 6:46  
"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"

Matthew 16:13  
When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

We can understand a lot about Jesus and His mission by understanding His names and titles. *Jesus* means "savior." *Jesus* is derived from the Greek *Iesous*, which is derived from the Hebrew *Yehoshua* (from which we get the English name Joshua).

Jesus truly was and is "God with us." He was and is the Son of God and therefore God. He was God in the flesh (Luke 1:35; John 20:28).

*Messiah* (from Hebrew *mashiach*) means "anointed" or "anointed one." Although the specific word appears in the Old Testament only in Daniel 9:25-26, many other prophecies promised a Messiah to be sent by God as a deliverer and liberator. Jesus came to earth the first time to deliver us from our sins and will come the second time to deliver us from mortality to immortality. The Greek for Messiah is *Christos*, from which we get Christ.

Lord means master. Yet sadly, most who called Him Master would not obey Him as their master.

Jesus usually referred to Himself as "the Son of Man." The reasons for this have been controversial among scholars, but we can state some likely reasons. Jesus used the definite article—He was *the* [unique] Son of Man, not *a* son of man. Jesus wanted all to know that He was human, but a very special human.

This idiomatic designation sounded reverential, but it was ambiguous in meaning. That may pinpoint why Jesus used it, because for most of His ministry, Jesus avoided referring to Himself as the Son of God or the Messiah or the son of David. He avoided what might sound political or blasphemous because He didn't want to stir up violent opposition prematurely.

Perhaps Paul was elaborating on this title when he referred to Jesus as "the last Adam," since *adam* is a Hebrew word for man (1 Corinthians 15:45). "The first man [Adam] was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man [Jesus Christ] is the Lord from heaven" (verse 47).

**Did Jesus exist before His human birth?**

John 1:1, 14  
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

To learn more about Jesus' preexistence, see Lesson 2 in this series of Free Bible Study Guides: "[The God Revealed in the Old Testament Was the One Who Became Jesus Christ!](http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org/bible-teachings/God-revealed-old-testament-was-the-one-who-became-Jesus-Christ.htm)"

**How was Jesus conceived as a human child?**

Matthew 1:18  
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

God the Father used the Holy Spirit to bring about the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Jewish virgin named Mary. For further description, see Matthew 1:19-23 and Luke 1:26-35. And for a description of the Word voluntarily giving up His divine power and glory to temporarily become a human being, see Philippians 2:6-8.

**What were the circumstances of Jesus' birth?**

Luke 2:1, 4-7  
And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered [for a census]…  
Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The events that followed Jesus' birth are described in the remainder of Luke 2 and in Matthew 2. The exact date of Jesus' birth is unknown, for God does not want people to celebrate Jesus' birth. To understand why and for thorough proof that most of the traditions involved in Christmas celebrations are not from the Bible, see our free booklet [*Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/HH)

**What was Jesus' childhood like?**

Luke 2:39-40  
So when they [Joseph and Mary] had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Matthew 13:55-56  
"Is this [Jesus] not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?"

Jesus grew up with His mother, stepfather and several younger siblings, the natural children of Mary and Joseph. Jesus certainly was precocious, being able at 12 years old to discuss Scripture with scholars at the temple (Luke 2:41-52). And in order to later be the perfect sacrifice and Savior, He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

**When, where and how did Jesus begin His ministry?**

Luke 3:23  
Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.

Matthew 3:13  
Then Jesus came from Galilee to John [the Baptist] at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

Matthew 4:1  
Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matthew 4:12  
Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

After His baptism and His 40-day fast and temptation by Satan, Jesus returned to Galilee to begin His ministry. Galilee is the area around the Sea of Galilee, north of Jerusalem.

**What was the message that Jesus preached?**

Mark 1:14-15  
Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

The word *gospel* means "good news." Jesus' message was about God's plan to offer the opportunity for salvation to all humanity, which means eternal life in the Kingdom of God!

**What else was remarkable and astonishing about Jesus' ministry?**

Matthew 4:23  
And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Jesus healed people everywhere He went, which reveals several important things. His miracles proved that He was sent by God (Acts 2:22). They showed that He cares for our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs. He loved and respected all people, regardless of gender, race, age or status, demonstrating a degree of love the world had never seen and which serves as a role model for all His future followers (John 13:34-35). He also used miracles to prove that He had the authority to forgive sins and to heal us of our spiritual problems (Matthew 9:6).

**Is Jesus the foundation and Head of the Church?**

Ephesians 2:19-20  
Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

Colossians 1:18  
And He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

**Did Jesus die and rise from the dead exactly as He foretold?**

Matthew 12:40  
"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

At the close of Jesus' 3½-year ministry, Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be arrested, tortured, crucified and killed. Jesus' last and most important sign was His prophecy that He would rise from the dead in three days and would be in the tomb exactly three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38-40). That was precisely fulfilled!

Careful study of all the accounts shows He was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon and was put in the tomb before sundown. He rose from the dead and then left the tomb exactly three full days later, in the afternoon of the weekly Sabbath (Saturday). See "[The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/HH/chronologyofchrist.asp)" for more details.

After His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven and returned to appear to His followers several times. Then 40 days after His resurrection, He again ascended to heaven to be at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 1:1-11). As Jesus repeatedly promised, He will one day return to earth (verse 11). And this next time, it will be "with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26).

**What was the main reason for the life and death of Jesus Christ?**

John 3:16  
"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 20:30-31  
And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Christ lived His earthly life to set us an example and to build His Church. He died for each and every one of us to pay the penalty of our sins so we can be forgiven of those sins. And He lives again to serve as our Savior, High Priest and Master (Hebrews 4:14-15).

**So what shall we do?**

Acts 2:36-38  
"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."  
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"  
Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

After Christ's disciples received the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter preached a sermon about Jesus being the prophesied Christ and how He had been raised from the dead and "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33). He told the assembled people, "You crucified" Jesus (verse 36). Of course, most of that crowd had no direct part in getting Jesus condemned to death. But we all are guilty indirectly because "all have sinned" and "Christ died for our sins" (Romans 3:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3).

When the people were convinced that Jesus was "both Lord and Christ" (verse 36) and that the guilt for His death lay on everyone, many of them asked, "What shall we do?" They knew they needed to take action. Peter then told them what each person must do to be forgiven of his or her sins and to receive the awesome gift of God's Holy Spirit (verse 38). Peter's instruction to repent and be baptized is just as true today as it was at that time. This is explained in more detail in our booklet [*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/TL/).

**Apply Now**

Knowing about our Lord and Savior isn't enough. We must, like those who heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, ask, "What shall we do?"

Read through the answers in [*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/TL/) and write down a plan of personal action in response to the perfect life and sacrifice of our Savior.

**Next Lesson:** [How to Build a Close Relationship With God](http://www.freebiblestudyguides.org/bible-teachings/God-how-to-build-close-relationship.htm)

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**Related Resources:**

[*Jesus Christ: The Real Story*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/JC)

[*The Gospel of the Kingdom*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/GK)

[*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/TL/)

[Shocked by the Bible](http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn87/shocked-by-the-bible.htm)

[Christmas Before Christ: The Surprising Truth](http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn85/christmas-christ-surprising-truth.htm)

[*Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/HH)

[How Can You Receive the Transforming Power of God's Spirit?](http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn88/how-receive-power-god-spirit.htm)