

## Why Jesus?

**Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him." (John 18:37-38)**

...nevertheless the Jews wanted to kill Jesus. Pilate gave in to them despite knowing that in this moment a great injustice would take place...

Who was this Jesus? What was his message? How did he live? Why was he killed? Why do we think that he cannot be placed alongside the most notable personalities of the history of mankind?

The basic facts of Jesus' life and death are attested to by renowned historians of antiquity such as Tacitus<sup>1</sup>, Flavius Josephus<sup>2</sup> and Suetonius.<sup>3</sup>

What we really know about Jesus though, is found in the Bible itself. We know that what is written about him in this book is true. Why? You can read the reasons for this in the article 'The Reliability of the Bible'.

Jesus was a Jew who acted primarily among the Jewish populous in Palestine.

Most of the people that Jesus came in contact with were deeply rooted in the belief in the one and only God (monotheism).

Just as Jesus assumed this belief of his audience, we shall also presuppose it as a base for reading this text. More general thoughts about God's existence can be found in a separate article.

Jesus' own public acting and words are not the only testimony to his credibility. Beyond that, it is confirmed in the **prophecies of the Jewish scriptures** written long before him.

The Old Testament describes how long ago, God helped those who were upright in heart to recognise that he was the one true God. Founded on this recognition, a nation was formed - the Israelites - who later were called Jews. God revealed key aspects of his being and his will through his acting among them.

Many books of the Old Testament nevertheless make clear that the realisations and experiences of the Israelites through God's acting in their history are the foundation for a deeper, more far-reaching revelation of God.

Jewish people led by God, the prophets, proclaimed that God would one day enable one man to preach his will with all clarity (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). This man would gather and lead those from among the nation who want to do God's will out of a sincere heart, just as a shepherd gathers sheep that have scattered together and cares for the sick and weak ones (Ezekiel 34:11-31).

It was God's will to make a new covenant with his nation. With his help they would be able to live for him and each other out of thankfulness and love - loving and helping each other from their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The prophets knew very well that God's election and special leading of one particular nation could only be temporary. It was the preparation for offering **all people** of all nations the same chance at a relationship with God. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that this chance would come through the one he called the "servant of God" (Isaiah 42:6, 49:5-6).

Throughout the course of his ministry, Jesus clearly showed that the old testament **references to the Shepherd and Servant of God found fulfilment in him** (Luke 4:14-22; John 5:37-47;

10:1-30). Many Jews didn't accept Jesus because they were hoping for someone who would give them political freedom. In contrast to this, Jesus spoke of an inner freedom – the freedom to love and do good independently of whatever situation one faced, by the strength given through the union with God.

## **We now wish to turn to more specifically to Jesus' life and teaching:**

Jesus grew up at the turning point in history, in Palestine. We know very little about the first 30 years of his life. Luke (a doctor who wrote one of the four gospels after having done exact research about what happened) tells us of one brief incident when Jesus was twelve. Even at this age, Jesus amazed the religious Jewish teachers with his interest and questions about faith and life with God. From the same author we know that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began to his public acting.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus said that he came **to call sinners to repentance**.

Everyone knows that there is so much suffering in the world because of lovelessness, lies, hypocrisy, envy, greed and egotism. Everyone who tries to be good tries to find a way out of this for themselves, and for those close to them.

**Jesus showed the way out very clearly:** Each one of us should take a critical look at ourselves. God, the creator, laid his standards, our conscience, within each of us. If we are ready to look for this standard, it is easy to know what is good and bad in our lives. If however, we act against this standard of God, then this standard gets distorted – even to the point that we call bad good, and good bad. This is a fact of each of our lives. No one can claim to have always acted completely righteously, uprightly, truthfully and selflessly – to never have had bad thoughts towards others or to have been indifferent towards them. Jesus was different. He claimed that he always acted in love (in God's will):

**And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. (John 8:29)**

This meant that Jesus touched a sore spot, and clearly named the points where people acted against God's standards. He did this so that people can live in love, unity and freedom together. The religious leaders of his day were especially hostile towards Jesus because of this. Even they, however, couldn't find anything to accuse him of in what he had preached:

**But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God. (John 8:45-47)**

Jesus can correct the distorted standards of man, because he completely fulfilled God's standards.

Jesus' message consists mostly of reminders of the values and virtues that lie hidden under the rubble of man's sin, that is, man's acting against the Creator's principles for life. Man has to clean up this rubble. As soon as he has the readiness to do this, then he becomes aware of the damage and guilt that is brought about by sin. This damage and guilt is caused towards two parties. On the one hand, the damage and guilt towards other people should be made up for, as far as it is possible. On the other hand, all sin creates guilt toward God, by rebelling against and dishonouring the creator. This guilt cannot be made up for. Man has nothing that he could give for it, because everything is God's. What he can do, is to admit his guilt, regret his sin, ask for forgiveness, and do everything that is in his power to immediately change his actions. This is what is behind Jesus' call to repentance.

This call is directly connected with the call to believe the gospel. The word gospel means 'good news'. This good news, is God's message about his love for mankind. God wants to restore us to a relationship with him, and forgive the guilt which separates mankind from him. When man gives up his rebellion and regrets his sin, God freely gives his grace. Jesus was sent as an unmistakable sign of the grace and love of God.

We, as creatures, need a relationship with God, because it is only in the relationship with our creator that we can find a truly meaningful life. Only through him can we experience forgiveness for our sins and deep peace. We need God's help in order to have ongoing strength to love and do what is good. Jesus compares this with the picture of a vine and its branches. Only by being connected with the vine can the branches bear fruit, otherwise they wither and die (John 15:1-8). God knows all the weaknesses of man. He doesn't take away man's responsibility to take steps to change, but he wants to grant man all possible help in order to be able to take these steps.

**Jesus embodied the love of God.** His words and deeds gave hope and courage to those who at that time, were considered hopeless cases with no chance of help or change. He exposed the hypocrisy, lovelessness and arrogance of the religious leaders. His aim in this was also that they too might be led to repentance, that is, to a change in their attitudes and their lives. He focuses their attention on the ancient commandment;

**Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, o Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself. ' There is no other commandment greater than these."** (Mark 12:29-31)

**God is love. He created us to love each other, to have joy in life and to have fellowship with our neighbour that is, with everyone. Whoever decides for this love, knows that it is not about behaving according to rules and regulations. Out of the relationship with God, and through the example of Jesus' life, everyone can know what is right and good,** and what is best for their neighbour - for themselves and for all people. This is the good news that Jesus brought - the way out of the mire of suffering, hopelessness, disorientation, hate and death.

Now we come to the point of what things Jesus did that cannot be explained as having merely been out of his human abilities. He said that his deeds testified to who he was. The people of that time heard his words and could see the amazing miracles he did with their own eyes. They were Jews, and knew that it is by God's acting alone that the blind are made to see and the lame to walk, the deaf could hear again, and even the dead were raised to life. These miracles were a clear reason why people couldn't simply pass by Jesus as they often do today. Jesus was just too special to ignore.

The claims he made were not those of one who simply teaches virtues to the nation. No other person in history causes more people to take sides, for or against him, than Jesus. This is because of the statements he made about himself. Today if someone were to claim to be the light of the world, the truth or the resurrection and the life, they would simply be ridiculed and not taken seriously.

**In Jesus we find a very unique combination: on the one hand, even when people look at his life today, they recognise that it shows moral truth in incomparable perfection, and that his words and deeds reflect a most appealing wisdom - sober and true to reality. On the other hand, he claimed to be the light of the world, and to have complete unity with God, ascribing himself with incomparable authority...** This was why people's reactions to him are either hot or cold. Whoever remains indifferent to his words hasn't understood them.

The Jewish leaders of his day, who didn't want to accept his claims thought they could solve the problem by killing him. Jesus remained true to his words even through his violent death because he knew it is the truth. Jesus life and just devotion prepared the way for those who want to follow him in the same way, and accept the reality about God and mankind.

The Bible calls on many eye-witnesses in reporting about **Jesus' death and resurrection**.<sup>5</sup> Many that were with him before his death saw him again – talked with him, touched him and ate with him. We can believe the reports of the eye-witnesses that he is alive. We experience his help in our daily life. When we turn to him, he changes our life and gives us clarity and strength in what we should do. His resurrection shows us that evil does not have the victory. God showed the world that the righteous do not simply die and disappear. Jesus trusted and knew that God is just. This is true for all who believe in God through him. Death is not the end of the line, or a terrible awakening. **Whoever follows Jesus will live with God, even when they die.**

Jesus is often put together in the same list as **Mohammed and Islam and Buddha and Buddhism or Hinduism.**

## **We would like to summarise a few important thoughts about Islam:**

In pursuit of his aim to build a political nation of monotheists, Mohammed was prepared to use force. Jesus brought a completely contrasting view. Before his death, he made it clear to Pilate that his kingdom is not like any that can be brought about by force or human endeavour. He said, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). You can only belong to God's kingdom by your own free decision, and not by birth or force.

The Quran describes many formal actions that are supposed to demonstrate respect for God, or that should lead one to have more respect for him. By contrast, Jesus showed that love and sincere faith are what are most important and are not expressed through the keeping of formal religious duties. Christianity is about learning to turn to others and love them as a result of the love received from God.

Jesus lived utterly truthfully to his own teaching. He said 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.<sup>6</sup> Mohammed never claimed anything of the like about himself, but rather condemned any such statement as heresy. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead shows that his words are truth. God does not support a liar or a heretic.

Mohammed never claimed to be infallible. He saw himself as a prophet to lead people to monotheistic faith. In Jesus however, God himself comes very close to us and shows us his great love and good will for us.

These are just a few reasons why we follow Jesus and not Mohammed.

**Eastern religions give us a picture of dissolution of the soul rather than resurrection. Buddha taught that life is only suffering.** He saw the origin of this as being the desires that create Karma. Karma, in turn, maintains the cycle of reincarnation<sup>7</sup>. Buddha saw this as torture. In the western world today however, reincarnation is seen as another chance at life. For those who hold this view it is a sweet and tempting thought – but one which cannot be found in Buddha's teaching. For Buddha, the aim of all thought and action is to extinguish the flame of life for reincarnation. The way to reach this is to renounce all demands on oneself, on others or life itself – to not want anything, but rather sink into a kind of divine calmness through meditation<sup>8</sup>. In reality this means indifference. This was the enlightenment that Buddha reached on his path of trial and error.

The following story is a clear example. It is an excerpt from the Buddha legend 'Sangámaji Thera', which is part of the Udána, from the Pali canon (ancient Buddhist texts from the 3rd – 5th Century BC). Here he calls on the hearer to give up the will to live:

"And the former wife of the venerable Sangamaji had heard it said: 'The monk Sangamaji has arrived in Savatthi.' Then she took her child and went to the monastery at the Jeta Grove, near Savatthi. At that time, however, the venerable Sangamaji sat at the foot of a tree to spend the afternoon there, devoted to meditation. Then the former wife of the venerable Sangamaji betook herself thither and spoke to the venerable Sangamaji: Look at thy little son here, O ascetic! Give me food!' But to these

words the venerable Sangamaji maintained silence. A second and a third time the former wife of the venerable Sangamajiso spoke: 'Look at thy little son here! Give me food!' And a second and a third time did the venerable Sangamaji preserve silence. Then the wife of the venerable Sangamaji laid the child down in front of the venerable Sangamaji and went away, saying: 'There is thy son, O ascetic; give him food!' The venerable Sangamaji however, neither looked at the child nor uttered a word. Now when the former wife of the venerable Sangamaji having gone some distance turned round, she saw that the venerable Sangamaji neither looked at the child nor said anything. Then she thought 'This ascetic cares not even for his child,' turned back, took up the child and went away." [note - quote not complete. Buddha's response missing]

This guiding principal is inherent in classic Buddhism. In the western world, the most common form of Buddhism is that of the later period of Tibetan Buddhism, which emphasises social justice or belief in gods, but the basic philosophy behind it remains unchanged, even if it is somewhat disguised.

In opposition to the teachings of Jesus, Buddha saw the desires as the origin of human life. The desires are the "builder of the house" and brought forth physical life, which in Buddha's eyes is suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The notion that life is nothing more than suffering does not correspond with the very essence of life as we know it, and doesn't match reality, even if there is a great deal of suffering in the world. We experience the love, joy and peace that Jesus spoke about as a very real part of our lives. The longing to experience these things is not something that should be extinguished. Rather, we should try to find the source of true love, joy and peace. God gives us the desire for these things - burned indelibly into our hearts. We want to use our entire strength - our entire will - for helping others to experience the joy of a relationship with God. We only have one life on earth. It's purpose is not that we suffer, nor that we run away from it, but rather, that we say "Yes" to God's love for us.

**The truth that Jesus gave testimony to is the reality as determined by God.** There is one God, the origin of everything and yet himself without origin. He is the creator of all things. Thanks to him, we exist. God is perfectly good, and because we are dependent on him, we cannot expect to find what is truly good independently from him or outside of him. Our happiness depends on having a relationship with him.

Because God is love itself, he wants to have a relationship with us, built in love. We are free to accept a relationship with him, which means accepting the reality that we must ask him what is good and right, and that only if we live according to his answers to us, will we be able to live with him after death. Jesus didn't only talk about how to live, but showed it through his own life, and offers help to all those who want to follow him in it.

The fruit of our lives (read more here: "[Who we are](#)") grows out of the love that Jesus had for people. Through him we came to understand who God is. We searched for his will and he gave us new life. His love changed us completely. Just as a father cares that his child grows and matures, so also, God forms us. This means that in place of hopelessness, lack of sense in life, selfishness, hate and lies, there is life in love, in unity and uprightness and experiencing the power of God that changes us. Through the relationship with him, our life is given meaning which does not end when we die, just as Jesus life did not end when he died. We are thankful to God for this, and want to express this thanks to him by devoting our life to him day by day.

If you are looking for the truth, don't let yourself be confused by the uncountable number of denominations that come under the name of Christianity. Take a closer look at the person of Jesus by reading one of the gospels in the Bible. We invite you to make contact with us too. Each one of us experienced how much it helps to search together for the right way to understand the words of Jesus, to look at the background and work out what parts refer to what times, and above all, to put what we understand into practice.

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## Footnotes:

1. Tacitus, Annals (115-117 A.D.)

2. Josephus Flavius (\*37 A.D.), Antiquitates XVIII, S. 63F
3. Suetonius, Vita Claudii 25,4 (120 A.D.)
4. Luke 3:23
5. E.g. 1 Corinthians 15:3-9
6. John 14:6
7. See Buddha's statements, e.g. Dhammapada 153, 154
8. See Buddha's statements, e.g. Samma-samádhi (Right Concentration)
9. See again Dhammapada 153, 154

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