

Key words:

- Son of God → a term for Jesus that emphasises he is God incarnate, one of the three persons of the Trinity
- Liberator → a general term for someone who frees a people or group
- Hypostatic union → the belief that Christ is both fully God and fully human, indivisible, two natures united in one person
- Homoousios → of the same substance or being
- Word → from the Greek logos, another name for the second person of the Trinity, used at the beginning of John's Gospel to describe the incarnation which existed from the beginning, of one substance with and equal to God the Father
- Redemption → the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil
- Incarnation → God born as a human being, in Jesus Christ
- Zealots → a member of the Jewish political/military movement that fought against Rome in the first century AD



Jesus' knowledge of God

- Jesus is worshipped, this is something which is done to a God
- Relationship between Jesus and God the Father is mysterious
- Jesus calls God 'Abba' (Greek for 'Father' or 'Dad') and a heavenly voice declares Jesus 'my Son' (Mark 1:9-11) but Jesus did not use the term 'son' himself
- Gospels → Jesus came into the world through intervention of Holy Spirit and Mary (Matthew 1:18)
- Christians do not see Jesus as a figure like the ancient heroes of the Greeks and Romans
- Jesus is directly associated with God by the text and is believed to be so by Christians
- St John writes of Jesus as Word, and that the 'Word was God'
- 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' John 1:14)
- Doubting Thomas refers to Jesus as 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28)
- In the letter to the Hebrews a psalm is addressed to Jesus as God (Hebrews 1:8)
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- 4th and 5th century had many debates on Jesus' closeness to God and his identity
- If Jesus is God and human, does that mean he had two beings inhabiting one body with one in the power of another?
- While this explains how Jesus could know God, it would mean Jesus is both God and a separate human being
- Rejected by early church
- This belief in the 'perfect conjunction' of Jesus' two natures was termed a hypostatic union (belief that Christ is both fully human and God)



How human was Jesus?

- In order to save humanity from sin, Jesus had to be divine as only God could have that redemptive power
- If Jesus was God did he suffer on the cross? How can God suffer?
- If Jesus did not actually feel pain and die from his crucifixion, that would mean his resurrection was not real, the cross is false and Jesus wasn't a real human being.
- He had to be God, as only God can save, he also had to be a human being as only humans needed saving
- If he wasn't God he couldn't overcome evil, if he wasn't human he couldn't overcome evil for humanity
- If he's not God he can't reveal the Father, if he wasn't human he can't reveal the Father to us
- If Jesus was fully human and fully divine it creates problems
- St Paul wrote that humans have a sinful corrupting nature (Romans 7:18-19), so if Jesus became human, wouldn't he become corrupted?
- Bishop Apollinaris of Laodicea worried that 'a human mind – that is a changeable mind... is enslaved to filthy thoughts', so suggested the Word replaced the human mind and soul with a divine one, without taking on fallible human nature
- But how could humanity be fully redeemed if not all of human nature was saved?
- Gregory of Nazianen rejected this suggestion because it constituted a 'half salvation'

Karl Rahner

Suggests a genuinely human consciousness must have an unknown future in front of it.

Life is conditioned by uncertainty → If Jesus was conscious of God the Father's awareness all the time, then his view of life can hardly be called a human one.

What was the extent of Jesus' self knowledge?

If Jesus had divine knowledge what do his expressions of emotions mean? Are they genuine? Were his tears at the death of Lazarus just fake?

Was he free to choose what he did? Is freedom a basic part of being human? Was his knowledge a human knowledge or did he look onto the world as the creator looks onto its creation?

To what extent did he have knowledge of his divine reality? Did he wander around being the Son of God, without realising it? Did he know he was the saviour of all?

Medieval theology responded with three kinds of knowledge that Jesus might have:

- Knowledge of the divine reality of God, face-to-face, and all the created realities (scientia infusa)
- An infused knowledge (scientia infusa)
- Knowledge of life in the normal way of human life (scientia experientiae)

Why is it important that Jesus could perform miracles?

- Demonstrates his authority
- For Christians, it reinforces the idea that he is God's Son
- Shows he is God incarnate
- Many of his miracles were performed to help people, demonstrating he was the Messiah
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How can miracle accounts be interpreted?

Hume → not possible to trust the accounts of Jesus walking on water, or any other miracles given by NT writers. Either the Gospel account must be taken on trust or rejected. If accepted it points to Jesus' amazing power over nature

Edward Schillebeeckx → miracles can be interpreted as having a spiritual or metaphorical meaning for today, rather than just a literal one about a past event.

N.T. Wright → Jesus cures people from groups who have been excluded from society. He is returning socially excluded, ritually unclean, separated groups back into a relationship with God

N.T. Wright → Jesus' miracles show a greater authority than simply a power to alter the way the universe usually works

Jesus the Son of God

There is historical proof that Jesus existed. The Romans wrote about a Jesus of Nazareth.

In the New Testament, the word God is used for Jesus which suggests that he is fully human and also fully divine. For Christians, it is essential that Jesus is fully God and fully human, as it allows for Jesus to have authority.

St Paul also speaks of Jesus as God's own Son.

Resurrection

Paul → A Christian faith without resurrection is impossible

'We have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised' (1 Corinthians 15:15)

E.P. Sanders → asks 'without the resurrection, would [Jesus'] disciples have endured longer than did John the Baptist's? We can only guess but probably not'

N.T. Wright → the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead was the reason why Jesus' disciples regrouped and rapidly changed their traditional worship practices to focus on Jesus

Resurrection became fundamental to what Christians believe about God: in the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, God will raise everyone from the dead (1 Corinthians 6:14)

Salvation is dependent on believing that Jesus was resurrected: 'If you declare 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)

Jesus the teacher of wisdom



- His teachings and moral example are appealing
- Believed to be a good, holy man who lived a life close to God and advocated repentance, forgiveness and spiritual purity. Life an example for others
- His teachings focussed on loving others (love thy neighbour), forgiveness, healing the sick, looking out for the vulnerable and outcasts
- Jesus' wisdom also contained a message of good news; salvation from sin and death and being reborn to eternal life
- Some refer to Jesus as being a rabbi with a special message
- He was a teacher, providing guidance and advice on the application of the law to moral problems.
- He spoke on moral ideas and issues: the importance of love, self-sacrifice, concern for the poor and dispossessed, the importance of honesty, justice and peace.
- He used moral education techniques with controversial or surprising stories (Good Samaritan)
- His moral message has carried on and is still relevant in modern day society.
- Goodness goes beyond the external actions we perform but reach inside to the motivation that drives us. The purity that we seek, is not measured by externalities, but by the inner intention.
- Teachings to support this idea are:
- 'it is what comes out of your mouth that makes you unclean, not what you put in' (Matthew 15:11)
- 'Those that are pure at heart will see God' (Matthew 8:9)
- 'Doing the right thing, being morally pure, was more important than maintaining ritual purity' (Mark 5:21; Luke 10:25)

Jesus and women

Jesus' involvement with women suggests he had an inclusive attitude towards them, in contrast to the patriarchal times he was living in

Jesus on wealth and power

- He warns his followers not to obsess over power.
- He identifies wealth as an obstacle to closeness with God, saying it is 'easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter heaven' (Matthew 19:24)

Jesus (God incarnate)

- Hick → The way in which Jesus is aware of God's will and God's willingness to act is NOT unique to Jesus.
- In this interpretation, Jesus is not a unique figure with a unique role in salvation
- He adopts a metaphorical understanding of incarnation and argues that Jesus remains close to God and is an inspiration for the world today as an example of how to live a good, moral life.

Responses to Hick

- Hick tries to provide a universally acceptable understanding of Jesus which retains the ethical message of Christianity.
- Hick interprets salvation as personal change, but this is quite different from salvation from sin and death and seems to lack the Gospel's message of political and social change. Phrases like 'eternal life' have less meaning in Hick's version.
- Bonhoeffer links the incarnation to both human salvation and an understanding that we meet God in human beings. This has strong links to the idea that we encounter God in the oppressed, the struggle for justice etc. Without the incarnation, a connection is lost with the idea of encountering God in human life and human lives, their seriousness and significance

Jesus the liberator

- Religious revolutionary. Also wanted to overturn social structures in society
- Challenged establish religious authorities → accused of blasphemy as he was put on the cross
- Sought to break down the division between God and people
- To some he was a reformer, seeking political revolution and the liberation of the people of Israel from the Romans (messiah)

Political revolutionary

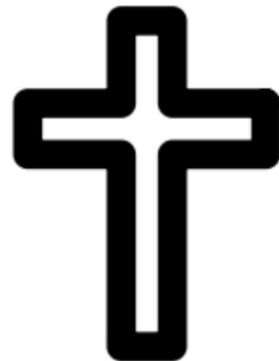
- Lived under Roman occupation. The Romans taxed the Jews heavily.
- Situation deteriorated with assassinations, murders and a series of open military rebellions
- Millions of Jew lost their lives, were kept as slaves and the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (still a significant place of pilgrimage for Jews today)



- The idea that he was a social revolutionary has influenced some twentieth century Christian movements including Liberation Theology.
- Some historians argue the Early Church 'tidied up' the image of Jesus and downplayed his revolutionary tendencies
- He was prepared to confront those in power to fight for the oppressed (disputing the Temple of Jerusalem by turning over the money changers' tables)
- 'I did not come to bring peace, but a sword' (Matthew 10:34)
- Jesus arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover at a time of violent revolution which incited the authorities.
- Jesus actively challenged negative impacts of the oppression.

Religious revolutionary

- Jesus made criticisms of the Temple and its cult, expressing the idea that it would be replaced by something better
- Challenged the role of the money changers at the Temple because of their practice of making money out of the ritual obligation that required people to buy suitable animals for sacrifice at the Temple.



Evaluating Jesus

Was Jesus only a teacher of wisdom?

Was anything that Jesus did new and revolutionary at the time?

Some argue his key contribution is the scope of people that he reached, that he encapsulates a wisdom of life that so many people find compelling and perhaps this is his legacy.

Was his wisdom just about morality? What about his spiritual messages, forgiveness of sins and salvation from death?

For some people the simple message of Jesus is himself → the good news of his message is not just what he said but who he was and what he did

For the first Christians the reality of the Resurrection was crucial in understanding the good news message of Jesus.

Was Jesus more than a political liberator?

Jesus' message was one of freedom (for the poor, needy the outcasts).

He associated with marginalised groups within society and took criticism for this

He clearly had a socially radical message that confounded existing norms and generated considerable conflict with the ruling religious and social classes

Some scholars → argue he was interested in political liberation as well – he associated with the Zealots and some have argued he wanted to actively lead or join a revolutionary movement against Roman oppression

Did Jesus think he was divine?

If Jesus was clearly aware of his divine nature all the time, how could he live as a normal human being?

Did he really have the emotions he presented, or were these all a pretence?

This would be a problem if it suggests that Jesus was deceitful

It would also undermine the sense in which his experience is similar to ours and whether he can be considered human