

The Case for Christianity

For “ER Docs and Crucial Talks”

Jack Kehoe

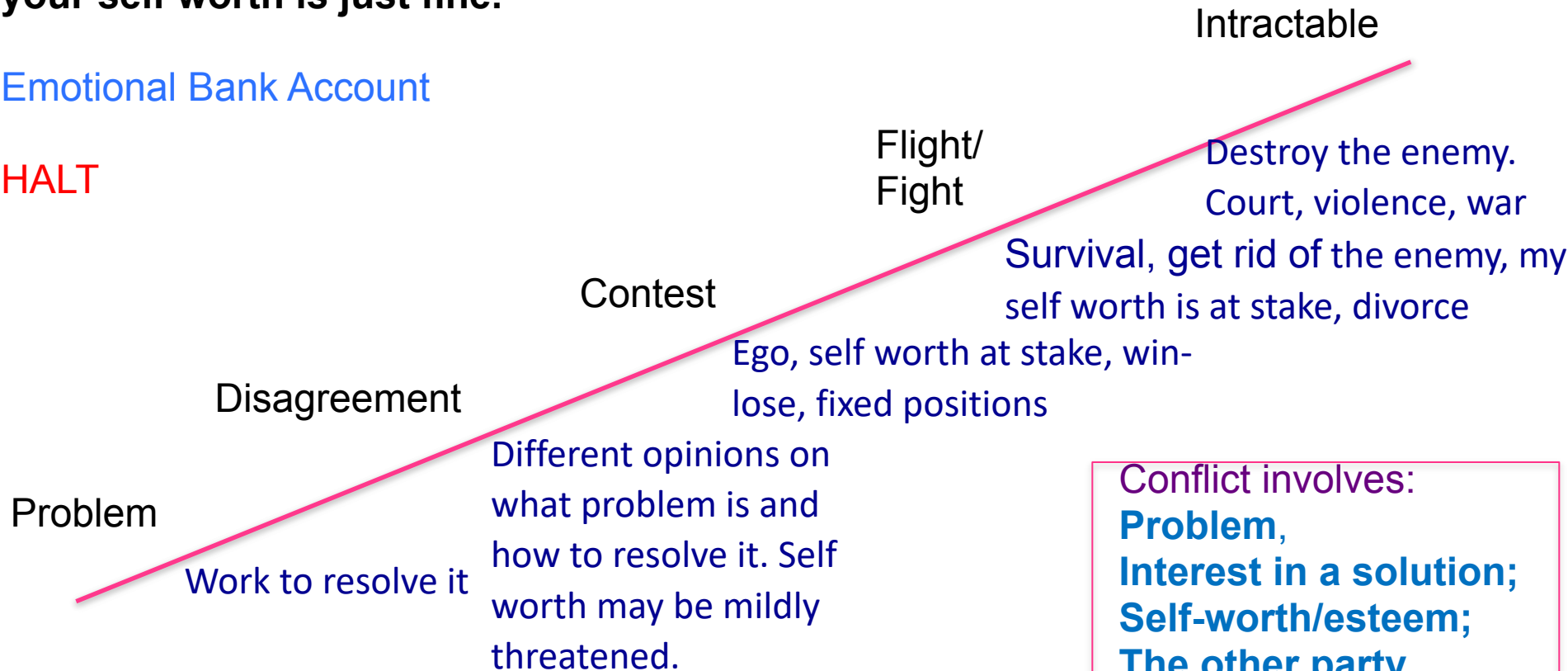
Levels of Conflict

Talk to self in 2nd person to disengage from emotion. “Jack, **your self worth is just fine.**”

We see an escalation in conflict from....

Emotional Bank Account

HALT



Conflict involves:
Problem,
Interest in a solution;
Self-worth/esteem;
The other party
Perceptions

Agenda

First, it will be about Christianity in broad terms, with no attempt, I hope, to persuade anyone, but simply to inform and understand.

- Recognize the God-filled spiritual blessing of the great religions of the world, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others.
- Why does Christianity matter?”
- Who is the Jesus in Christianity? Who is the Jesus of history?
- Who Jesus is to me. Four stories.
- The New Testament scriptures, especially the Gospels, and Paul.
- The growth of Christianity from the beginning.
- The proclamations of Jesus’ divinity.
- What is salvation? How does Christian faith offer salvation/redemption?
- The ethical demands: love, humility, forgiveness, generosity, labor, justice. We are held accountable. “What you do to the least, you do to me.”
- Christianity is held in earthen pots. The rain and sun fall on both the good and the bad. The problem of sin.
- What is prayer; public and private, tips on praying
- Ecumenism, “that all may be one.”
- Resources, a few: slides, TV series (3), books (4), and movies (1)
- Supplemental Slides: to expand resources and build on material

Background

- Raj asked me, in ER Docs' second episode, to talk about the **mystery of God. Now I'll expand that by talking about Christianity.**
- I grew up a **cradle Catholic**, have listened to thousands of homilies* and lectures, and have made many silent retreats to help me get closer to God. I have an **MA in Theology and MA in American History**, and have continued to study scripture, theology and the life of Jesus for many years.
- My conversation will be **instructional in a broad** way and hope that any listener can relate to it. I'm **not out to convert anyone**. This is an introduction, so I'll be rather factual, **historical** and objective while also diving into the **heart of the Christian faith, and what it means to me.**
- Why might this subject interest you? We committed Christians believe we've **won the lottery**, the prize being **a life full of meaning** that infuses our daily living. In your work **you meet Christians** every day, say, in a hospital bed, coworker, family. Do you work in a faith-based hospital--Christian culture.
- You listen to beautiful music like Mozart's Mass, and visit beautiful cathedrals and art museums full of **Christian art**. What motivates this?
- **Popular music** is infused with Christian themes.

Background Page 2

- Do you have a **sense of history**? **No one was and is more influential** than Jesus Christ. Christianity has more members than any religious tradition.
- **All the great religions have at their core an encounter with God**, however named, and a **surrender to God of our very self**. The offshoot is a greater reverence for life and respect for others, a sense of the meaning of life even in suffering, and living the command to love one another.
- Most Christians believe that **the Living God is at work in all endeavors**, and even in those who don't recognize God.
- **God is the one who looks upon me with mercy; I am the one who looks up to God with hope.**
- **What does it take to be a Christian?** One word, **baptism in Christ**—There is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.* ~ Paul, Ephesians 4:5
- **NOTE ON SLIDES: We will put on ER Docs website slides that provide a more expanded presentation of “Christianity” than in our conversation. They contain detailed content like you normally would find in speaker’s notes. The bold text is similar to bullets in a slide presentation.**

The Mystery of God

- Christianity starts with the Mystery of God. Listen to “Meet Jack Kehoe,” second episode of ER Docs podcasts.
- All the great religions center on this Mystery, a being who in some way transcends creation and yet lives within creation as source and mystery. God is in nature and the human psyche. There are many designations and many aberrations in understanding. But at the center is the Mystery of God.
- The most developed sense is found in the Judeo-Christian religions, where God is one, transcendent and immanent, to whom we humans give over our lives in obedience to God’s commands.
- Christianity brings this Mystery to the forefront in the person of Jesus. The fullness of God’s life and love lives in Jesus. He fully reveals who God is for us, the Mystery to which all things tend.
- For Christians Jesus is teacher, healer, comforter and a great man of history. But he is not just a person we admire and follow. Jesus is a Force Field which draws us into his very person and being; he is God as a human being.
- Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, who is before all things, in all things, and to which all things tend.” ~ Rev.

Opening Reflections

I would like to start with **a few reflections from Scripture and Literature** to enter into the flavor of Judeo-Christian belief.

• ***As the deer longs for running waters, so my soul waits for you, My God. Ps 42***

- The human yearning for God. The divine spark that wants to burn through. Prison ministry, most heinous crimes, convert and surrender to a Loving God. (Play 30 seconds of music.)
- Other songs: I will lift you up On Eagle's Wings (Isaiah); Amazing Grace; Were You There When They Crucified my Lord?
- Mozart, Beethoven, L. Bernstein's Masses
- Jesus Christ Superstar with John Legend (Jesus, Judas, Mary Magdalen—rock music, choreography)

• ***You have made us for yourself O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*** ~ St. Augustine, 400 AD, Confessions (his journey to God); giant of western literature and religious thought.

• ***We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*** ~ Declaration of Independence

- The source of human dignity; we are made in the image of God and have a place in the world.

Opening Reflections Page 2

- *Do not judge, and you will not be judged. For with the measure you measure, it will be measured to you.... Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ~ Luke 20*
 - Talk about wisdom with a punch, and perhaps humor.
- ***Father, into your hands I commend my spirit; then he breathed his last.*** ~ Luke 23
 - Here the Mystery of God reaches its culmination in human history when Jesus, hanging on a cross, suffocates to death after agonizing pain, torture, and rejection. God in Jesus gives over his life on the Cross out of love for human kind.
 - The second act of this great drama of the Passion is Jesus' resurrection from the dead into new life. Jesus enters a new dimension of life as he returns to his Father.
 - Two ways to salvation for humans: love and suffering
 - The Cross becomes the central image of Christianity, and the world: God's love revealed fully in the giving of his Son.
- ***Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.*** ~ John 20
 - The beginning of the mission of the post resurrection Church when Jesus appears in the upper room. The first word is "Shalom," Peace.

- ***The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.*** ~ Psalm 23
- ***Can a mother forget the child she has borne? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.*** ~ Isaiah 49
- ***If I speak with the tongue of men and angels, but have not love, I am nothing but a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.*** ~ Paul 1 Corinthians 13
- ***Zacchaeus, come down at once from that tree. I want to stay at your house today.*** (He was a despised Jewish tax collector.) ~ Luke 19
- ***Woman, who from the crowd has condemned you? No one, Lord. Nor will I condemn you.*** ~ John 8 (The woman was publicly accused of adultery.)
- ***Come to me all who labor and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest.***
~ Matthew 11
- ***Jesus cried out, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit; then he breathed his last.*** ~ Luke 23
- ***Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.*** ~ John 20

What Do Christians Believe?

- **Christianity is a monotheistic religion** based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. **Jesus was a Jew and his early followers were Jews.**
- Jesus Christ was an **itinerant Jewish teacher** (rabbi), healer, leader, who **spoke with authority**, and engaged and often **confronted the established Jewish authorities** (chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees). He **preached a new Kingdom of God** based on personal sacrifice, not on power and conquest. He is the **Son of God** who comes from his Father to reveal what God wants to give to the whole human race..
- **He was crucified, died and was buried.** On the third day **God raised him from the dead**, and he appeared to many. The Spirit of Jesus informs our lives. The Christian churches carry on Jesus' mission.
- **Jesus is the fulfillment of the Jewish expectations**, and of the prophecy of a Messiah who would save Israel. (Messiah means the anointed one, translated in Greek as Christos). **He is called a prophet, teacher, healer, Lord and Redeemer.**
- The life and teachings of Jesus the Christ are **chronicled in the New Testament**, especially in the Gospel (Good News) accounts of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.

Two Definitions

Before starting I want to clarify two items you will hear:

- **God the Father is a common reference** in scripture, especially in the New Testament. God is the Father of Jesus, and our Father. **But for some listeners “Father” does not bring up positive feelings**, but negative ones, from their family history.
- So, one may refer to God as **God the Creator** or Mother, for the **Living God in his or her great Mystery has no gender**.
- **Followers and disciples, what is the difference?** A disciple is a **follower who is committed. Disciple comes from the same root as “discipline,” which means doing what it takes**—musicians, athletes, soldiers, students. A discipline is a field of endeavor that a student commits to learning. In a relationship a disciple stays in through thick and thin.

Jesus the Leader: Mission, Vision, Values

Jesus was a great leader, perhaps the most influential person ever —1.2 billion Christian followers today, over 2000 years after his death.

•**Lets apply to Jesus the leadership model put forth by your amazing recent guest, Dr. Aaron Dominguez.** It helps bring clarity to what Jesus was about.

•**Mission: to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.** Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is already alive, active, and growing in the world like an acorn grows into a mighty oak. The Kingdom has a **cosmic dimension--we reach our final end as a people, alive forever** in the heavenly Kingdom of the Living God. (Hard to believe, but true.)

•**Vision: to bring all humans to know, love and serve the Living God, and experience the inner peace and joy that arises from knowing God's enduring love for every person.**

Jesus the Leader: Mission, Vision, Values P. 2

- **Values:**
 - **Fulfill** with all his energy **his Father's will for human kind**: salvation through suffering and love.
 - **Preach the Kingdom of God without flinching**, using every means at his disposal (except force or violence). He knew that **promoting this Kingdom of mercy, inner conversion, and non-violence would lead to his brutal death, the Cross.**
 - **Engage fully with every person he meets**—scholars of the law (scribes), Pharisees, Temple authorities, outcasts, lame, blind, lepers, demonized, women (in a patriarchal society), tax collectors, gentiles, Samaritans, prostitutes. The **very social Jesus loved to have dinner** with all of these.
 - Reimagine and **reinforce the Jewish law as the law of love of God and neighbor**, which must infuse and supersede all human religious laws.
 - **Hold himself and others accountable** for living out God's truth for human kind.
 - **Bring peace, mercy and joy** to every person's daily life, including in pain and suffering; to **experience the cross as redemptive suffering.**
 - **Pray in intimacy as the divine Son in union with his Father (early; all night).**
- **Practice: Jesus' life as told in the Good News accounts**, that leads to **the ultimate sacrifice of his own life**, and through his relationship with the Living God, his resurrection from the dead. He leads all humans toward the hope of rising to **a new dimension—eternal life.**

Jesus' Apostles

- Unlike John the Baptist, **Jesus set up an organization**. He chose from his followers **12 apostles**, (“person sent”) to carry on his mission of spreading the Kingdom of God. **Paul**, who converted to Christianity a mere three years after Jesus' death, identified himself as **the 13th apostle**. Peter, James and John were the “pillars” of the early church (Luke's Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's letter to Galatians.)
- Following Jesus' death, **the Apostles and other witnesses to Jesus' life and death began to preach in public squares and synagogues, and gather in homes for private services**. The early preaching is called “the Kerygma”--the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- **The apostles who had walked with Jesus followed his command to spread the Good News**. The apostles and numerous disciples, as **eye witnesses** of Jesus' life, **spoke with authority** about Jesus' teaching and deeds. They also carried out Jesus' mission by their healing ministry.
- To watch a **very moving TV series on the apostles and an engaging Jesus, do an internet search for, *The Chosen, 2019***, and/or download the app on your IOS or Android device. You may project the episodes to your TV. *The Chosen* , I think, will captivate believers and non-believers.

The Early Church

- **The number of Christians grew rapidly in the early church. They met in homes** where they prayed, sang hymns, and listened to literate members among them read the **Jewish scriptures** to help them **understand words and events in the life of Jesus**. Within a few years they were also studying the letters of Paul, who proclaimed Christ crucified, alive and living in the churches.
- At meal time they celebrated the ***“breaking of the bread,”*** in remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice. **In an early letter Paul proclaims, *“Is not the cup of blessing that we drink a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”*** ~ 1 Corinthians 10:16, As mentioned, **eye witnesses to Jesus life** were often present.
- As the **Gospel accounts began to circulate**, early Christians read the accounts of Mark, Matthew and Luke, and later, of John. They discussed, reflected, prayed, and applied to their lives what they read and heard. There were many communal expressions of their faith and worship.
- Luke’s **Acts of the Apostles**, a very interesting book, **chronicles the life of the early church** and the ministry, journeys and troubles of Paul.

My Christianity “Inborn”

I volunteered to engage in this topic. Meet Jack Kehoe, encounter with God.

- First, **I’m steeped in my Catholic Christian faith** and enjoy discussing it. Christianity is first about Jesus. Jesus Christ is in my bones; my God, my brother, my friend, and the one to whom we all must give an account.

- Second, **I’m a cradle Christian-Catholic**, the initiation rite for all Christians, child or adult, is baptism. I was baptized at 3 months old. I went to Catholic grade school, high school, **seminary, and St. Louis University as a member of a Catholic religious order, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).**

- I remember **In grade school, the nuns, very fine educators, who taught us religion**, mainly using the **Baltimore Catechism**. There were bible stories, but we mainly memorized the questions and answers. I can still recite:

- **Why did God make me?** – God made me to know, love, and serve him in this life, and be happy with him forever in heaven.” We went often to Mass and Adoration as a school class and family.
- **What are the three forms of baptism?** “The three forms of baptism are **baptism by water, by blood (martyrdom), by desire.**” You see, if everyone must be baptized to be saved and get to heaven, as we were taught, **Baptism of desire opened the door to universal salvation.** The well meaning people of the world who did not know Christ would desire baptism if they knew about him. We’re all loved in God’s eyes.

- I have master degrees in U.S. history, and theology from St. Louis U. And I’ve maintained a great interest in both subjects for over 60 years, through reading, attending seminars, retreats, listening to homilies, and much prayer and meditation on the life of Christ. Also studies on Church and ecumenical efforts

What Christianity Means to Me

- First, **Jesus is the center of my life**. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end, who anchors me in the love of God. All good things come through Christ.
- St. Paul says, “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.” I experience this. **Christ permeates my bones, mind, heart and soul**. I sense this most days throughout the day. I believe my life would seem rather empty without **the indwelling of Jesus**.
- **Jesus Christ is my rock** that sustains my faith. **He reveals to me the Mystery of God**. He is my closest **friend**.
- I am his adopted brother, so **I confide in him in joy and pain**. God said to Jesus, *You are my beloved Son, and you bring me great joy.* (Mark 1:11) And as Christ’s brother he says the same to me—**you are my beloved son**. Also, to women: *You are my beloved daughter*.
- **Jesus guides me in difficult decisions**...leaving the Jesuits, marrying Lorrie...who to vote for. **He gives me strength to move forward in hard circumstances**, like in illness, conflict, change.
- **In the beauty of worship in my church community** my heart is lifted up to God and God enters my soul. **Jesus is the bread of life**.
- I admire Jesus and **seek to imitate him**. He provides a **model for living my life**.

Personal Experiences and Reflections

- In 1953 I began 2 years in a **seminary in San Antonio right next to the beautiful old Mission Conception**. I received a great education, had great friends, and **learned to pray and listen a lot**.
- After two years in the seminary I joined the religious order called the Society of Jesus (SJ); I became a Jesuit. **My Catholic Christianity has been heavily influenced by the spirituality of St. Ignatius**, who founded the Society of Jesus' in 1540. I was a Jesuit for 16 years, ordained a priest after 13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_of_Jesus (See Slide Supplements)
- **Career: so many high points, decisions, stresses, disappointments, rewards, relationships—the same as every one of you in our audience. I loved my career(s).**
 - **Story:** David K, a company outside consultant, and I used to facilitate **Leadership Development** workshops for executives and senior managers of the international company where I worked. Before the sessions we would administer and individually debrief participants on a **360 degree instrument** developed by the Management Research Group in Portland Maine (360--feedback from self, boss, colleagues, and subordinates). Each year the MRG would hold a seminar in Portland of representatives from all users of their instrument. One year David and I were presenters at the conference. In answering a question from the floor, **I emphasized the importance of a spiritual dimension in leadership development that went beyond just the technical aspects of leadership, that is to tie leadership development to the greater desires of the soul**. I was surprised at the positive response from many participants.

Personal Experiences and Reflections Page 2

- My growth in faith has **few dramatic conversion points**, but I have heard **testimonies of such conversions** from friends, fellow Christians, and celebrities. (e.g., Tom D, Terry S., dramatic healings, Louis Z. (See Salvation)
- At the same time, like many, I've had many **God-sightings, experiences where I've known and sensed God working in my life**. Decision after high school to answer Christ's call to study for the diocesan priesthood, that is, as a parish priest. After two years I discerned the call to enter the Society of Jesus, to become an order priest that answers to a General Superior.
- **Ordination** to the priesthood brought joy and some trepidation.
- Loved the Jesuits. But as I **became friends with Lorrie**, I sensed that I couldn't spend a life without her. Darkness over several months. Reflecting back, God was calling me to a new life. (Golden Anniversary 6/12)21)
- So many others: **birth of each child** and the joys and challenges of guiding, protecting, and letting them go. It's the process of **Roots and Wings**.
- **Hundreds of transcendent, mountain-top moments of beauty, goodness and truth**. Know God, and am overcome by the Spirit of God's action on my mind, emotions and soul. The mountains, the streams, the music; my family, and dear friends and mentors and spiritual guides. Jesus Christ speaks, angels abound. **Gratitude** is now so persistent it can overwhelm me.

Scripture :Beauty, Insight, and Inspiration

- **Prodigal Son (Luke 15)** (better named the Loving Father.)
- The story—**dissolute son**, reached bottom (pigs), plans what he will say, returns home. **Father** long way off **Self righteous son**. God and us.
- **Good Samaritan (Luke 10)** Samaritans were a shunned heretical tribe. The story— **“And who is my neighbor?”** **Man waylaid and left for dead**, priest and Levi pass by, Samaritan cleans him, puts him on his donkey, takes to inn. *“Which one was the man’s neighbor?”*
- **Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector (Luke 19)** The story— Jesus passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus climbs a tree, *“Zacchaeus, come down right now. I want to stay at your house today.”* Zacchaeus jumps for joy; will give back all he has stolen.
- **The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8)** The story—authorities bring a woman to Jesus, stone her? Jesus writes twice with his, God’s, finger. *“Let the one who has not sinned cast the first stone.”* They slink away, Jesus is alone with the woman. **“Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”** **“No, Lord.”** *“Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”*
- **Many, many more stories that connect us to God and our own humanity; and challenge us to rethink our life’s way.**

Inspiration From the Life of Christ

His life is so rich and full, so many events; teaching especially through parables (stories) healings, disputes. **These stories from scripture are on the internet.**

- **Baptism of Jesus**—his Father’s beloved, full of God’s Spirit ~ Mark 1: 8
- **Sheep and Goats**, the last judgment—accountability ~ Matthew 25
- **Canaanite woman**—a **Syrophoenician woman tells Jesus after his sharp refusal to help her, a gentile**, *“even the dogs eat from the scraps of the table.”* Jesus relents and heals her daughter. This clever, forceful woman opens Jesus’ eyes to a ministry that will include gentiles. ~ Matthew 15:22
- He meets a **Samaritan woman** at the well and offers her flowing water. “He told me everything I’ve ever done.” The first missionary. ~ John 4
- **Blessed are.... The beatitudes**, the new Torah, the inner attitude. ~ Mt. 5
- **Entry into Jerusalem** and hailed by crowds: ***Hosanna to the king of the Jews.*** ~ Mark 11
- **Attacking the money changers**—my Father’s house, a den of thieves. ~ Mk 11
- **Crucifixion and death--:*****Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.*** ~ Mark 15:21
- **Resurrection**—empty tomb and appearances—***“Peace be with you,” “our hearts were burning along the way.*** ~ Last chapters of all the Gospels

Jesus Christ's Divinity

Christians profess that Jesus was both human and divine. There are many passages in the New Testament that describe this profound, early Christian faith.

- **John's Prologue** and other declarations in John's Good News account. John, Chapter 1

- **Paul's Letter to Philippians**, Chapter 2

- **Peter's Profession.** Matthew, Chapter 16

- **John's "I Am"-statement's**, and the great unity prayers before the Last Supper. John, Chapters 14-17

John's Declaration of Christ's Divinity

John's Prologue (John 1:1-18) is the beginning of John's Good News account. It is a reflection on **God's divine Word taking on our humanity (incarnation)**. **Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God. The Word is God's complete self-expression in the person Jesus.**

- ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made....***
- ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth....***
- ***No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.***

These words proclaim the central Christian belief, that God who is Love, fully reveals himself, and expresses his love of humans in the person of Jesus, who is the divine Son of God.

Paul's Great Proclamation of Faith

Paul's Letter to Philippians (Philippians 2: 5-8): **Paul wrote this letter between year 60 and 65**, thirty years after Jesus' death. Paul incorporates in the letter a **liturgical hymn**, which for some time had been proclaimed in early church communities.

*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in **Christ Jesus**,*

Who, 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.*

Sources: Matthew's Good News Account

- In Matthew's account (16-18), we see **Peter's profession of faith**. Jesus asks Peter, *Who do you say that I am?* Peter: ***You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.***
- Matthew's Gospel was written **around the year 70** to Jewish Christians and gentile converts to Judaism. **Jesus is the new Moses** who gives a new law to humans, expressed beautifully in the **Sermon on the Mountain**.
- A **central message** that **bridges the Jewish expectation of a Messiah, and the new Christian proclamation** that Jesus is the Messiah, is captured in a very short phrase: "One doesn't put new wine in old wineskins."
- In the story of the **sheep and the goats**—the last judgement—**God will judge us on our compassion** or lack thereof, **toward whoever is in need**.

Sources: Luke's Good News Account

- **Luke's account**, written to gentile Christians around year 80, **emphasizes the mercy of Jesus and his profound prayer life.** Even on the cross he is actively saving others, “this day you will be with me in my kingdom... Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”
- Luke relates some of the **most beautiful stories** of the New Testament, such as the **Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and Zacchaeus the tax collector**, up in the tree to get a look at Jesus.
- Luke might be **the best read** for one first delving into the Gospels.
- **Luke's “second volume,” the Acts of the Apostles describes the early church in its beginnings, and the journeys of Paul to preach the Good News.**

Sources of Christian Belief: John

- **John's account**, written around year 90, **is the most profoundly theological account**, a literary masterpiece. Many scholars say that on certain points John presents compelling historical information. For example, Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist, and himself baptized others in the river Jordan. The first disciples, Simon (Peter), his brother Andrew, and Phillip were first followers of John the Baptist.
- **John the Apostle's sources come from a separate oral tradition**, distinct in origin from the other three gospel accounts.
- **John's main themes emphasize the Love that God has for us, and God's promise of eternal life through Jesus.** *Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!* ~ John 17:24

Sources of Christian Belief: Paul

- The **earliest written testimony of Christian** belief about Christ **are the letters of St. Paul** to the churches of the Middle East, Greece and Rome; also to a fellow apostle (Timothy) and a friend (Philomen).
- **Within 2 or 3 years after Jesus' death, Saul, a zealous young Pharisee, began tracking down, interrogating, and arresting people of this heretical sect called "The Way."** *For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.* ~ Paul, Galatians, Chapter 1.
- A few years later after **his momentous conversion**, Paul, as he was now named, **went alone into the Arabian desert** to pray, and to come to grips with his conversion that had **upended his whole conception of God and the Jewish Law**. He then began a ministry to Jews and Greek-speaking Gentiles.
- Shortly into his ministry **he went to Jerusalem and spent two weeks picking the brains of Peter**. He was appointed apostle to the gentiles.
- **Paul's earliest letters were to the Thessalonians around 50 AD, within 20 years of the death of Jesus, with other letters spread out over the next 15 years.** Others were written while he was in house arrest in Rome.

Sources of Christian Belief: Paul 2

- Throughout his letters **he preaches Jesus Christ crucified and raised**, and exhorts the communities to **practice Christian love**. *“If I preach with the tongue of men and angels but have not love, I am a pounding gong and a clanging cymbal.... Love is patient, love is kind, love bears all evil....At the end, three things endure: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.”* ~ Corinthians Ch. 13. **Paul here translates love in heaven’s Kingdom to us on earth** who are striving to practice love in God’s Kingdom on earth.
- **The command of practical love permeates all of his letters. It reflects the love of Jesus on the cross, which reveals God who is Love.** (Read Galatians Ch, 5—the freedom of Christians; and the outcomes of the “flesh” and the “Spirit.”)
- **Paul suffered greatly from his ministry. Read in 2nd Corinthians his missionary journeys.** ~ 2 Cor 11: 16-33.... *Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move....* Plus, the **anxiety** from the love of my Churches.

Salvation

- Salvation and redemption are central themes in both Old and New Testaments. **What is salvation?** From what? How are we saved?
- **Cosmic salvation:** in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ all creation, and humanity, have become one with God (atonement).
- **Personal salvation** has to do with **freedom from the terribly destructive thoughts and behaviors that hurt us and those around us**--a radical turning that **releases the soul from sin**.
- **What holds us bound is unbound.** *Lazareth, come forth (from the tomb)...unbind him.* (John 11) We go free.
- Many of you have a defining event that leads to a new freedom to become **one's full self**. (It is not the "freedom" to do whatever suits us--that contributes to emptiness and upsets the moral order.)
- **What binds us? A vast number of addictions and unfettered self-interests.** (In your 3rd podcast episode **Cameron** was saved when he poured out the bottle of vodka in the presence of his mother. **He became free to be who he really was**, made in the image of God. We see now his amazing generosity, leadership, and tenacity in his worldwide work for the poor through Sneaker Hearts.)
 - The love and devotion of Cam's mother inspired him to stop drinking

Salvation Page 2

- **Death is the last chain that binds us. Ultimate salvation is to move from death into life.** Christians firmly believe that in Christ's death and resurrection humanity has overcome death. We look forward to our resurrection to live with the Living God for eternity. *O death where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?* (Paul, 1 Cor.15:55) This is salvation with a Capital S!
- **God calls everyone to be saved.** We have many examples (a personal one?)
 - **Garth Brooks** stepped down from performing and freed himself to live with his family, which he attributes to God.
 - **Louis Zamperini** (Olympic gold medalist, shot down in WW2, held brutally tortured by the Japanese, full of hate; Billy Graham's call to "come forward
- **I've known several friends, and heard many testimonies** from others, who have been profoundly freed by Jesus to be their true selves and gain purpose and happiness. They responded to God's call to inner freedom. **Tom D.**, (Come to me all who labor and burdened); **Terry S.** (a picture of something long past).
- Through **forgiving another or being forgiven** by another **we are unbound. Acts of forgiveness heal us.** They unbind another to see themselves whole again. **God lives in forgiveness.**

Salvation Page 3

- *Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. God said, "Look, I am making all things new!" ~ John, Revelation 21*
- *The spirit and the flesh are in conflict....The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you...that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*
- *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ~ Paul, Galatians 5*

Salvation Page 4

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Sin, Accountability, Spiritual Warfare

- **The first call in the Good News is to turn away from sin.**
- **Return to ethical demands:** love, humility, forgiveness, generosity, labor, justice. **We are held accountable.** "What you do to the least, you do to me."
- We too often today call sin a "mistake" (How stupid, I fell and broke my wrist). But **sin is much more than a mistake** It **involves moral decisions, actions or inactions that shatter relationships,** destroy people and nations, and scar our own soul. **It alienates us from God, our own humanity, and those close to us and far away.** Yes, it's a **HUGE** mistake!
- **Sin is pervasive.** It stems from our **weaknesses** (we often don't want to sin, but we do anyhow), our **lack of a moral conscience,** and the **deliberate path of hate, greed, power, envy, lust, malice, anger and violence.** Just watch the evening news.
- **Genesis 4, Cain's murder of his brother Abel "Am I my brother's keeper?"**
- We sense we are in a **spiritual warfare, within ourselves and with the world around us. Let's build a moat around our homes to protect our children and grandchildren** from the attacks that bombard families, for example, the addictive, evil side of social media.
- **Reclaim our moral awareness** found in the **Ten Commandments, the teaching of Jesus and other great religious leaders;** and **become a constant example** of the kinder, gentler, and accomplished side of humanity.

Prayer and Contemplation

- **ER Docs and guests have often talked about the importance of contemplation** to restore oneself, reduce stress and improve wellbeing. It involves deep breathing, silencing the mind, use of mantras, and other techniques.
- **Prayer** is a broader term. **Its motive is union with God, growth in love of neighbor, and petitions for healing. It includes contemplation.** The physical/emotional benefits are meaningful by-products.
- In prayer we can make a **distinction between meditation and contemplation.** In **meditation** one **actively uses one's mind and imagination** to focus.
- In **contemplation** one **calms the mind and moves quietly inward** to focus. The two methods may complement each other in the same prayer session.
- **There are many ways to pray**, because prayer is ultimately guided by the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit of God blows where it will.
- **Made in the image of God, we are lifted up in prayer. As we know God, we find ourselves**, for we are made in the image of God. (Genesis: 1 & 2)
- And while persons have much in common, each one of us is unique and very different from all others. **We approach God as we are**, with all strengths and weakness, foibles, and sinful tendencies and actions.
- **Christians come to God through Christ, who is the center of our prayer. Jesus fully reveals his Father, the Living God.**

Meditation: The Good Samaritan

- **Meditation uses the mind and senses:** imagination, thought, emotion, decision-making.
- **Choose a scripture passage.** Let's take the **Good Samaritan** (Luke 10: 25-37). Following a dialogue, **A scholar of the law**, seeking to justify himself, **asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?"** **Jesus** avoids explanation and **simply tells a story.**
- **The story:** A man was beaten and robbed and left by the roadside to die. A Jewish Priest and a Levite pass him by. A hated heretic to the Jews, a **Samaritan merchant, stops and tenderly cares for the man**, takes him to an innkeeper and tells him that he will pay him for sheltering the man.
- Jesus asks, **"Who was neighbor to the man?"**
- **By imagination, put yourself in the story.** For example, become the wounded man crying out for help. See, hear, feel the priest and Levite pass you by; and the third man stop and bathe your wounds, lift you on his donkey, and take you to an inn. Hear the words of Jesus,
- **Continue to follow the story**, and at any point, quiet the mind. **Begin to rest in what speaks to you.** Go inward and **move into a quiet contemplation.**
- **You could also continue the thinking process by applying the lessons in the story to your life.**

Meditation in Prayer

- **Divine Reading (Lectio Divina)** uses study and meditation that leads to contemplation: read the story three times.
 - First reading of the story: seek to understand it, what it means in the context of those times and culture, and what it means today.
 - The second read: ask what in the story touches you. Did a word or phrase strike you.
 - The third read: go into quiet contemplation, away from the mind into wordless, listening prayer, using the word or phrase that struck you as a mantra.
- **Guided meditation. A person reads a story outloud**, while you visualize the images. Very good for calming the mind. What is read may be a descriptive passage from scripture or scenes to create quiet reflection.
- **Journaling:** keep a diary, or journal, in which you **write your reflections, what struck you, what you are thankful for and spiritual movements, or tendencies**. You can **write about your emotions** such as anger, or envy, or what insights you gain from meditation and contemplation. It is a stream of consciousness that you don't have to worry about editing. Sometimes it helps you to get anger, fear, self-doubt or other emotions out of your system.
- **Imagine healing: Jesus holding and healing you or a loved one in a life moment of deep loss. Suicide**, imagine Jesus being with your loved one at that moment, holding him to his heart. **Separation loss, say at birth:** Jesus with you as a baby, you both held, or even nursed by Mother Mary. These are your own inner guided images.

Contemplation in Prayer

- Contemplation, as mentioned, has **various techniques for relaxing mind and body, and going inward**. In Christen prayer one seeks a quiet experience of God and his action in the soul. **Methods and Tips:**
- **Deep breathing/listening to your breath** (four seconds breathing out, six seconds breathing in and holding).
- **Relaxing the body by relaxing parts of the body** until the whole body feels relaxed.
- **Taking a prayerful position**, like kneeling or a cross leg position, etc.
- After relaxing and putting one's self in the presence of God, **repeat a mantra**, a "sacred word."
- As **distractions** occur, rather than fight them directly **let them float on by as flotsam on a river. Return to the word.**
- My **favorite mantra's** for contemplation:
 - Come, Lord Jesus ("Maranatha"); or, just "Jesus."
 - Peace; or Joy; or Love; or Courage; I surrender to you.
 - I am the vine, you are the branches. (John 15). (I reverse the pronouns: You are the vine, I am the branch.)
 - As the Father has loved me, so I also love you.
 - Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord
- Or, **use words from your scripture reading** as mantras; rest in a phrase or image.

Ecumenism

- **Ecumenism: the effort to promote unity among the world's Christian Churches.** These initiatives encourage greater cooperation between Christian churches, in accord with the command of Christ.
- **Jesus' great prayer: *I pray, Father, that they all may be one, just as you are in me and I am in you.*** (John 17:21) The Spirit of Jesus works in the Christian churches to overcome age old separations.
- **Interfaith prayer services now are common** and include Jews, Muslims, Hindu, Buddhist, and other faiths. These are inspiring and encouraging.
- **Paul spent his life striving for unity** among all who believe in Christ. ***There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.*** ~ Paul, Ephesians 4:5
- **Conflict and disunity among denominations has been long standing and bitter**, in both doctrine and practice.
- In the last sixty years **great progress has been made.** Official representatives of Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist and the Reformed Churches, such as Presbyterians, have **signed agreements about the understanding of justification** (faith vs works and much more). Limited **agreements** have also been **made on the understanding of Eucharist (Holy Communion).**
- In all denominations, there are those who condemn these efforts. **Pray.**

Resources

- **TV series, *The Chosen* (2019), now in Season 2. It is the most human portrayal of Jesus ever done; and it tells the stories of the very human people he chose to follow him. A unique story line and superb acting.** Search on the internet. Better: download the app to handheld device; add app to streaming service, open the episode on your device, and watch on TV. (Note, there are many Chosens out there. Make sure you've got the right one.)
- **The Immense Weight of Playing Jesus. The actor who plays Jesus in *The Chosen* talks with the director, about the Jesus he plays that brings out Jesus' humanity.** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZdB7H8ty8g&t=34s>
- **TV: *Word on Fire*. Bishop Robert Barron on Christianity and almost any other subject. Brilliant, well done and informative.** (Jordan Peterson has two long interviews with Bishop Barron on Peterson's show (interesting but heavy stuff, probably above my paygrade.))

Resources Page 2

- **Book: Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion.** By **Greg Boyle**. A poignant, humorous and inspiring book, Tattoos tells the story of Fr. **Boyle's work with young people in gangs in the toughest area of Los Angeles**. His Homeboy Industries has grown into the largest gang intervention in the country. Here is a link to browse the book on Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com/Tattoos-Heart-Power-Boundless-Compassion/dp/1439153159?asin=1439153159&revisionId=&format=4&depth=1> Also, check him out on YouTube..
- **Book: Jesus: A Pilgrimage**, by James Martin S.J. It is designed for people of deep faith or no faith who want to know about Jesus. Fr. Martin visits the sites of Jesus' life, describes the scenes, their history, meaning and application. Great if you plan to visit Holy Land.
- **Book: The Purpose Driven Life**, by Rick Warren. This book has sold over 36 million copies. The message: **to discover yourself go out of yourself. You must begin with God, your Creator.** You were made by God and for God, and until you understand that, life will never make sense. Meant to be considered chapter by chapter over 40 days, *The Purpose Driven Life* has changed many people's lives for the better.
- **The Scriptures: nothing more direct, powerful and, yes, interesting.** They require study and reflection to understand, move and inflame our faith. **You might start with St. Luke's Gospel.**

Resources Page 3

- **Movie: The Case for Christ (2017)** Based on a true story, award winning journalist and legal writer for Chicago Tribune, Lee Strobel, is an avowed atheist. His wife Leslie's newfound faith in Christ compels Lee to disprove the claims of Christianity, pitting his resolute atheism against her growing faith. A good movie, very real. Here is a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ-rMsgbCF0>
- **Book: Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives.** For those interested in history, F. E. Peters, a renown scholar of Islam and Christianity, puts the sources for the two side by side and traces the historians' parallel efforts to understand the men behind the sources. The bulk of the work is devoted to a **side-by-side study of the remarkable careers of Jesus of Nazareth and Muhammad of Mecca.** Published 2010, 215 pages, fascinating.
- **Book: The Return of the Prodigal Son,** Henri Nouwen. With over a million copies sold, this classic work is essential reading for all who ask, "Where has my struggle led me?" **The themes of homecoming, affirmation, and reconciliation will be newly discovered** by all who have known loneliness, dejection, jealousy, or anger.

Summary

- Recognize the God-filled spiritual blessing of the great religions of the world, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others.
- Why does Christianity matter?”
- Who is the Jesus of our faith? Who is the Jesus of history?
- Who Jesus is to me. Four stories.
- The New Testament scriptures, especially the Gospels, and Paul.
- The growth of Christianity from the beginning.
- The proclamations of Jesus’ divinity.
- What is salvation? How does Christian faith bring us to salvation?
- The ethical demands: love, humility, forgiveness, generosity, labor, justice. We are held accountable. “What you do to the least, you do to me.”
- Christianity is held in earthen pots. The rain and sun fall on both the good and the bad. The problem of sin.
- What is prayer; public and private, tips on praying
- Ecumenism, “that all may be one.”
- Resources, like *The Chosen*, TV series.

SUPPLEMENTAL SLIDES

- Repeat and expand on previous material about Jesus and the Gospels
- Examine very briefly the historicity of the Good News accounts.
- Spirituality of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises
- Ignatius' Maxims (1500's AD) and ER Docs
- Size of major religions, 2020

Jesus: Who Was He?

- **Messiah—anointed one**, Christos in Greek. Groundswell of belief that the Messiah's coming was eminent, a warrior king who would overthrow Rome's yoke and bring about a complete restoration of Israel.
- Jesus' dilemma in preaching the Kingdom of God was that he was a **non-violent Messiah** whose mission was to fashion a people of peace, who worshiped God in spirit and in truth. This was very difficult for his listeners to grasp.
- **Non-judgmental**: The only people he judged were those who judged others, **the self-righteous**.
- **Women supported Jesus**, and were among the first to recognize his mission and spirit. Featured in some of the most moving scenes in the Good News
- **Healer**—he cast out demons (evil spirits behind illness, mental and physical) "by the finger of God." He cured every type of infirmity.
- **Loved The poor, prisoners, sick, lame, blind, lost, sinful humanity**
- **Criminal**: convicted of sedition—to overthrow Rome; handed over to Pilate by Jewish temple priests and lawyers for blasphemy. *Pilate had a sign posted on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews."* ~ John 19:19

Jesus: Who Was He? Part 2

- **Taught love**, taking as profoundly his own the Jewish teaching: **Love God with all your heart**, mind, and soul; and *love your neighbor as yourself*. A lawyer after hearing this asks Jesus, “*Lord, who is my neighbor?*” Jesus doesn’t explain. Instead he tells the story of the **good Samaritan**. After a Priest and Levi had passed by a traveler left for dead by robbers, a despised Samaritan tenderly takes care of the man. Jesus asks “*which of the three were the neighbor to the man?*” ~ Luke 10
- **Taught forgiveness**. *How many times, Lord, should I forgive, seven times? No, seventy times seven times* (every day, in matters large and small). See Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the woman caught in adultery (John 8).
- **High ethical demands**. Sermon on the mountain “*Do not let the sun go down on your anger; if one takes your coat, give him your tunic;*” If you “*look at a woman with lust, you have already committed adultery with her in your heart.*” **He speaks with authority, going beyond the ten commandments to a new attitude** that fulfills and expands the commandments.” Read Matthew 5.
- **Holds his followers accountable**. Sheep and goats, the Last Judgement. ~ Matthew 25

The Good News of Jesus Christ

- Christianity begins with Jesus, so that is where we should start.
- **The first gospel account**, that is the first narrative of the good news of Jesus, was Mark's, around between the years 65 and 70.
- So here is **Mark's opening line** of his good news account. *"The beginning of the **gospel of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God.**"* This sounds rather bland to our modern ear, but to those living around the year 65 in Palestine this opening was powerful.
- The first word "**gospel**" means **a public proclamation of good news**. When the Roman Emperor won a great battle, or announced the birth of a son, messengers went to proclaim the "Good News" throughout the empire. Good news—listen up!
- "**Jesus,**" "**Yeshua**" in Hebrew, means "**one who saves.**" The name describes what Jesus does—he saves.
- **The Jewish people longed for the coming of the Messiah, that is the "anointed one," who would overthrow their enemies.** "**Anointed**" in Greek is **Christos**, used here like a proper name. Christ in his preaching, healing, cross and resurrection saves the human race and begins the movement, to the "ends of the earth," of Christianity.

The Good News of Jesus Christ P.2

- **Jesus is the “*Son of God.*”** In the Roman Empire the emperor alone could claim that title. Mark puts it forth for Jesus. It is also used in the Jewish scriptures, and **here signifies *Yeshua’s* unique relationship to God the Father.**
- **So Mark in his first line has set the stage for the story** and message of his Good News proclamation about Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God.
- Everything in Mark’s Good News looks toward the crucifixion of Christ. The passion, the cross, makes up 40% of his Good News. **You can’t understand Christ until you understand the cross!**
- **Matthew’s account**, written to a Jewish community, ends with the words, *“Go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.... Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.”* Christians are sent to proclaim the Good News to the world. Thus the **onset of Christianity.**
- We’ll talk about Good News of Luke’s and John’s accounts later.

What Christians Believe About Jesus

- **Jesus is the eternal son of God**, who made the supreme sacrifice of death on the Cross, and whom God raised from the dead. Jesus now, as the universal Christ, lives with God in glory, and lives with us as savior, brother, friend, and center, to bring us to life on the last day.
- **The New Testament** describes Jesus' life, teachings, and commands, most notably the command to love God and neighbor...a command of his Jewish faith that he taught transcends the prescriptions of the law.
- **The call to salvation is for everyone**, as a people and as individuals. Salvation involves **an admission of our sin and woundedness, and demands a change of heart and mind** to accept the salvific power of God in our lives.
- **Jesus' death on the cross** was the ultimate act of sacrifice by the son of God, and was **the full revelation of the love and mercy of God for all humankind**. His death is seen also as an act of atonement, where in giving himself to torture and death, **he restores human kind to a right order with God**, so we can freely become "at-one" with God. It is also a call to imitate Jesus in our own sacrifice for others, and to find God's love in our own crosses.

Reading the Gospels and Letters

- **The gospel accounts and letters** are much more than pure historical or biographical documents. They **are faith documents written by people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God, whom God had raised from the dead**. There was an empty tomb and Jesus had appeared to many, attested by multiple accounts, including the Jewish historian of the time, Josephus.
- The people of that time had a **history of oral tradition**, and they **could remember events** in much detail and pass them on to others.
- **The Jewish people had a strong literary tradition. They chronicled events.**
- **The Gospel accounts stemmed from oral traditions, written down initially** in a piecemeal fashion from listening to preached accounts. Many were **eyewitness accounts** (12 apostles and other close disciples). Oral memory was strong...etc. **The gospel writers read, consulted, compiled and embellished these accounts to fit their purposes.**
- **My example: stories about my grandmother and grandfather from the 1890's. Core events to which I added details from what I knew about them and the customs of the time.**

Historicity of the Gospels Criteria

- **Textual.** Do you know how many ancient texts there are of Homer's masterful sagas, the Iliad and Odyssey—four. How many of the Gospels and Letters? **Over 5000, some almost identical wording with others.**
- **Historical authenticity criteria: multiple attestations, i.e., distinct sources tell essentially the same core story,** e.g., that a sign on the cross read “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” That Jesus preached the “kingdom of God,” that he healed, that he fed a crowd.
- **Discontinuity with the customs at the time.** For example, that Jesus a rabbi ate regularly with sinners, and he didn't follow the ritual washings.
- **Embarrassment** to the early Church (that John baptized Jesus)
- **Continuity with other authenticated facts,** The action or story fits what we know from other criteria.
- **Specificity of time and place in sync with customs.** E.g., the children sang, “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.” “But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil.)

Spirituality of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises

- **My Catholic Christianity has been heavily influenced by the spirituality of St. Ignatius**, the founder, in 1540, of the religious order called the Society of Jesus (SJ). Members are called Jesuits. I was a Jesuit for 16 years. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_of_Jesus
- Composed 1522–1524 by Ignatius, the **Spiritual Exercises are a set of Christian meditations, contemplations, and prayers about God's action and our desired response**. They include meditation on **Jesus' life and mission; the call of Christ** to all; the giving of our response; **our self-surrender; God's love for us** seen in nature, humankind, each person, and human endeavors. Ignatius also includes practical instructions on how to pray, make decisions (discernment of spirits); see God in all undertakings; identify the types of sin (examination of conscience); practices to overcome sinful tendencies; how to give the a generous interpretation to another's words and actions; and many other tips and techniques. Over five centuries **The Exercises have shaped the lives**, by God's grace, of millions upon millions of people worldwide, Catholics and Protestants. As a young Jesuit I made the 30-day silent retreat and annual 7-day retreats thereafter. A few years ago, I guided a retreatant through the Exercises, meeting once a week for a year with assignments for the daily meditation of one hour. **Retreats can expand our spiritual horizons and open us to graces that may change our lives.**

Ignatius' Maxims (1500's AD) and ER Docs

- Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam (AMDG). **To the greater glory of God.** Say this in the morning and at times throughout the day. It puts meaning in your day and transforms all you do to a prayer to God.
- Age Quod Agis. **Do what you are doing.** Live in the present moment with full energy and concentration.
- Magis: **More**, increase effort. Agere Contra: **act against**, confront impulses. Non Multa Sed Multum. **Not many things, but much** [with each thing]. Do your best and don't worry about the outcome.
- Suscipe. **"Take, Lord, and receive** all my liberty....all that I have and possess. You gave it all to me, Lord; I give it all back to you." Great saints in all religions come to this state of consciousness. No longer anxious about rejection and pain or whatever they will suffer.
- "Lord, Jesus, teach me to **be generous... / To give, and not to count the cost / to fight, and not to heed the wounds / to toil, and not to seek for rest / to labor, and not to ask for any reward / save that of knowing that we do thy will.**"
- Listen to **ER Docs: The Man in the Arena (Episode 4), The Four Agreements (Episode 23)** and several others **bring to mind these concepts for living.**

Population

Size of major religious groups worldwide, 2020

Religion	Percent
Christianity	31.11%
Islam	24.90%
Unaffiliated	15.58%
Hinduism	15.16%
Buddhism	6.62%
Folk Religions	5.61%
Other Religions	0.79%

In a 2015 survey, 75% of adults in the United States identified as Christians. That number is dropping, for a number of reasons. Surveys are readily available. See Pew Institute and studies on causes.