



# Story of Reality.

A simple review of our Christian Faith

*(taken from Greg Koukl [www.str.org](http://www.str.org))*

**Sermons by**

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## Story of Reality Introduction. What is Christianity?

To explain our faith, we must be able to give a clear, concise and credible explanation of Christianity. *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.* <sup>1Pet.3:15-16</sup>

**Christianity is a picture of reality.** It is an account, or a description, or a depiction of the way things actually are. It is not just a **view from the inside** (a Christian's personal feelings, or religious beliefs, or spiritual affections, or ethical views, or "relationship" with God). It is also a **view of the outside**. It is a view of the world out there, of how the world really is in itself. **Put another way, Christianity is a worldview.**

All of us have beliefs about the world we think are accurate. All of us have a worldview picture—at least a rudimentary one—forming in our minds, even if we are not consciously aware of it. Religion tries to tell the story of "reality" as they see it. Every philosophy and every individual outlook on life is also a take on the way someone thinks the world actually is. There is no escaping it. These stories are meant to bring order to our beliefs, to explain the "pieces" of reality that we encounter in life, whether big things or little things, important or inconsequential.

**All worldviews are not equal**, though. Like a jigsaw, you must have the right pieces in the right order and from the right jigsaw or they won't fit! Some religions (world-views) have pieces that seem to fit together (internally) better than others, and some have pieces that seem to fit reality (externally) better than others. If they are good stories—that is, if they explain many things, especially the most important things, in a way consistent

with our normal encounters with the world—then we have more confidence the stories are accurate, which is just another way of saying that that worldview is true.

**Maths Not Bigotry.** If our Story is really true in the deep sense, then it ought to be obvious that other religion stories, taken as complete pictures of the world, are simply mistaken. This does not mean, of course, they are wrong at every point. That would be a foolish mistake to make. There are many individual things a religion might teach that are sound, as far as they go. I mean, rather, that if one Story is true, all other stories taken as a whole cannot be true as well. A man once told Greg Koukl that he was probably one of those bigoted people who thought 90% of the world was wrong about their religion. Greg agreed with the 90% part, but told him that it had more to do with maths than with bigotry. Think about this. Some religions teach Jesus is the Son of God and others deny it. Fair enough. But is it not clear that somebody is right and somebody is wrong on that score? There is simply no getting around it. The great monotheistic faiths understand God as a distinct, individual person, whereas some Eastern religions see God as the impersonal sum of everything all put together. Is it not clear that, if there is a God, both of these notions cannot be true about Him at the same time? Clearly, massive numbers of people are mistaken on one side of this issue or the other. When anyone dies, they might go to heaven, or they might go to hell, or they might be reincarnated, or they might disappear into nothing at all. But even a child can see they cannot do them all at the same time. Multitudes—the majority even—must be mistaken. Again, that's not bigotry - it's simple maths. So then, though it's the rage these days to say all religions are basically the same, it turns out not to be the case at all. **What ought to strike us, is how unlike each other they really are!**

When it comes to the most important things, each religion's picture of reality is quite different from the others. And those differences simply cannot be smoothed over by invoking naïve stories about blind men and elephants that do not really get to the heart of the matter.

**The Narrow Way.** To many, the Christian Story seems too narrow in light of today's sensibilities and “*political -correctness*”. Only one way to Heaven? That is nearly impossible for most people to take seriously. As one bumper sticker states: “*God is too big to fit into one religion.*” And those who think differently, think too highly of themselves and their own beliefs. Does God really care about the theological details? After all, isn't He more interested in how a person behaves than in what he believes? It might be helpful to note that even though Christians are faulted for being small-minded for this view, the idea was not invented by them. Christians promote the “*narrow way*” because Jesus Himself was the author of it. He made the claim repeatedly, many times in many ways. Every disciple on record whom Jesus personally trained to carry on after Him delivered the same message: *Enter God's kingdom through the narrow gate. The gate is large and the road is wide that lead to death and hell. Many people go that way. But the gate is small and the road is narrow that lead to life. Only a few people find it.*<sup>Matt.7:13-14</sup>

Jesus made some other very exclusive statements including: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*<sup>Jn.14:6</sup> *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*<sup>Jn.3:18</sup> *I can guarantee this truth: The person who doesn't enter the sheep pen through the gate but climbs in somewhere else is a thief or a robber.*<sup>Jn.10:1</sup> *Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*<sup>Lk.9:26</sup> *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*<sup>Mk.16:16</sup>

But why would Jesus, of all people, say such things? Wasn't Jesus' main message about equality, fairness, social justice, loving our neighbours - inclusion, not exclusion? Jesus cared about those issues, which is why we find them scattered here and there within His teaching, but they were not the heart of it, not according to Him. No, there is a reason Jesus made this controversial claim about Himself, and it had nothing to do with arrogance, bigotry, or small-minded exclusion—a kind of cruel trick played on unsuspecting people to guarantee their damnation. **Rather, it had to do with the nature of reality**—a very real problem with man and his world that needed a very real solution. **Humanity is afflicted with a moral disease called sin.** Rebellion has created an enormous debt. **There is only one antidote: payment. Either Jesus pays for us, or we pay for ourselves.** It's that simple. **That is why He is the only way of salvation.** *She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus [He Saves], because he will save his people from their sins.*<sup>Matt.1:21</sup> Jesus is the only one who solved the problem, since He is the only one who paid the price. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.*<sup>Is.53:5</sup> He paid so we wouldn't have to pay. This is not fantasy - it is fact. We sinned in time-space history—the real world. Jesus died in time-space history—the real world. If, you want genuine healing instead of emotional distraction or a temporary to relieve the distress of life, then you need a genuine Healer. **That is what Jesus offers: genuine healing, actual restoration with God, true forgiveness**— reality, not fantasy. Over the next 5 weeks we will look at the 5 basic ingredients to Christianity: God, man, Jesus, cross and the final resurrection.



**Remember, Christianity is a worldview—a depiction of the way things actually are.** Keep in mind that religious people, scientists, sceptics, and atheists all have worldviews they believe are true. Just believing something doesn't make it true. **But Christianity is different from other stories in a significant way because Christianity is history not fiction!**

## **The Story of Reality 1. God.**

Last week we began this series by asking: *What is Christianity?* Our answer was that **Christianity is a picture of reality or a worldview** and we began to show that although all religions have worldviews, they can't all be right. Humanity is afflicted with a moral disease called sin but there is only one antidote: **payment**. Either Jesus pays for us, or we pay for ourselves - it's that simple. And because no-one can actually pay for themselves, Jesus is the only way of salvation. *Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?*<sup>Lk.7:41-42</sup> *May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins.*<sup>Col.1:11-14</sup> This is not bigotry but purely a matter of maths! **The Christian story of reality includes: 1. Creation:** How things began—ultimate reality. **2. Fall:** How things went wrong. **3. Redemption:** How to fix what went wrong. **4. Restoration:** How things get worked out. The **Christian story can be summarised in these five words: God, Man, Jesus, cross,** and the **final resurrection.**

There is a logical order to these 5 elements. **1.** Our story starts with **God**; He created everything, including the most valuable thing in all creation: man. **2.** But something went wrong: **man** rebelled. **3.** So God set up a rescue plan. In this plan, God entered into the world that He created by becoming a man: **Jesus**. **4.** Jesus did something very special to rescue man from his problem - this happened on the **cross**. **5.** How people respond to this solution will determine what will happen to them at the final event of history: the **resurrection**. This week we are looking at the first part of the Christian story: **God**

**1 The Christian story starts with God.** The main Character of Christianity is God not us. Christianity is **not** about God's plan for my life but **my life for God's plan**. *From one man he made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live. God did this so that people would seek him. Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him. They would find him even though he is not far from any of us. 'In him we live and move and exist.'* As some of your own poets have also said, *'We are his children.'*<sup>Acts.17:26-28</sup> Yes the Christian story is all about God: *In the beginning, God.*<sup>Gen.1:1</sup> Yes. *I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*<sup>Rev.21:20</sup>

**2. There is a personal God who created everything else out of nothing.** *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*<sup>Gen.1:1</sup> If you make something you own it – it belongs to you. So the universe and everything in it including us, belongs to God. We don't belong to ourselves, we belong to God because He is our rightful owner (Lord). The Christian story acknowledges that Jesus is Lord: *Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*<sup>Phil.2:9-11</sup>

**3 God is King over all that He's created.** That's what a kingdom is: a “king” and a “dom[main].” The main theme of the Bible is **Ruler-ship – God's ruler-ship, His Kingdom.** Jesus' (and His followers') main message was **the Kingdom of God** (or heaven) – what it is like and how to be part of it. *From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’*<sup>2Matt.4:17</sup> *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>Matt.5:3-19</sup> *‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.’*<sup>Matt.7:21</sup> *As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*<sup>Matt.10:7-8</sup> *Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John the Baptist].*<sup>Matt.11:11</sup> *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*<sup>Matt.12:28</sup> *The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you... The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field...*<sup>Matt.13:11-24</sup> *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>Matt.18:3-4</sup> *Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again... Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.*<sup>Jn.3:3-5</sup> *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy.)*<sup>Rom.14:17</sup> *For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power.*<sup>1Cor.4:20</sup>



The Kingdom of God is about welcoming people back under the proper authority of God's Ownership (Lordship) so we can be restored to the relationship with God that He intended from the beginning.

**4. God is distinct from His creation.** Other worldviews of religions and philosophies conflict with the Christian view of reality especially in this matter. Materialism (mater-ism) views the world as only consisting of mater – of physical things. Materialism says that there is no God, no angels, no soul, no miracles, no life after death and no accountability. This is similar to the Sadducees of Jesus' time: *Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)*<sup>Acts.23:6-8</sup> Some of the Eastern religions view the world as consisting of God as the "great mind" and everything else is an illusion. However, the Christian view of the world includes both matter and mind. Everything belongs to God – both matter and mind, substance and spirit, physical and non-physical and science is as valid as the soul. But God created man as a unique being, different from everything else and He made man especially valuable, because man bears God's image in a deep and profound way. *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.*

*Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.* <sup>Gen.1:26-28</sup> The value God puts on people is the value of His Son: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* <sup>Jn.3:16</sup>

The curious thing about the God of the Bible is how unlike us He is. His wisdom confuses us; His purity frightens us. He makes moral demands that we can't live up to and then threatens retribution if we don't obey. Instead of being at our beck and call, He defies manipulation. In His economy, the weak and humble prevail and the last become first. Did we or could we invent this sort of God? **No! But this is the true God.** *Be thankful. Then we can worship God in a way that pleases him. We will worship him with deep respect and wonder.* <sup>Heb.12:28</sup>

Next week we will look at the second element of this **Story of Reality: Man** – that is, you and me and our role in the story.

## **The Story of Reality 2. Man.**

Last week we saw that the Christian story starts with **God** - that He is the main Character of Christianity, not us. Christianity is not about God's plan for my life but **my life for God's plan.** Because God made the world and everything in it, He is the rightful Owner of us all and so the main theme of the Bible is Ruler-ship – God's ruler-ship, His Kingdom. This week we are looking at the next part of the Christian story which is the story of Reality the way things really are: **Man.**

**Man is special because he was created by God.** When God created the world, He made the visible from the invisible. *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.* <sup>Heb.11:3</sup> *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.*<sup>Jn.1:1-3</sup>

**Man was created with a physical body** and so we are very much like everything else in the world – material. We are not “*little gods*” or divine beings but we are dependant – we need help to live and without air, water and food we will die. [Although God says “*You are gods*”<sup>Ps.82:6</sup> and Jesus quoted this verse: *Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?*<sup>Jn.10:34-36</sup> the context is about **living like God** by making sound judgements, not about being little deities. If we don’t live like sons of God then we will die like mere men and not sons of God!<sup>Ps.82:7</sup> We are Holy Spirit filled Believers and should not act like mere men.<sup>1Cor.3:3-4</sup>]

**Man is a non-physical spirit with a soul.** Although we are creaturely **we are not junk**. We are the greatest all the creatures in the universe because there is something special about us **because we are spirit. We are a spirit, have a soul and live in a body:** *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>1Thes.5:23</sup> Both man and animals have “*the breath of life*” in them (i.e. they have souls): *And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*<sup>Gen.1:30</sup> *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*<sup>Gen.2:7</sup> The soul is the self-conscious part of us - our psyche or personality, will, emotions and intellect. Souls have a conscience and a sense of right and wrong (this includes non-Christians):

*Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.*<sup>Rom.2:14-16</sup> But man is the most noble of all creation because he is created in God's image and **God is Spirit.**<sup>Jn.4:24</sup> Our spirit is the God-conscious part of us and it is our spirit that makes us different from the rest of Creation (only mankind has the ability to worship God). *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*<sup>Gen.1:27</sup> God's Temple is our body - He dwells in us and our spirit is joined with Him. *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.*<sup>1Cor.16:19-20</sup> *But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*<sup>1Cor.6:17</sup> Although our will is in our soul, God's will is in our spirit and **we release God's will by praise and thanksgiving** (praise and thanksgiving are decisions of our will in our soul): *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.*<sup>Ps.100:4</sup> We enter His presence as we praise God with our soul. Just as praise (*saying good words about God*) and thanksgiving releases God's will, so saying bad things about God, grumbling and complaining quenches God's will: *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit.*<sup>1Thes.5:16-19</sup> *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused.*<sup>Nu.11:1</sup> *Do everything without complaining or arguing. Then you will be blameless and innocent. You will be God's children without any faults among people who are crooked and corrupt.*<sup>Phil.2:14-15</sup>



If we are miserable, ungrateful, etc. it is because we have decided not to praise God and have forgotten all His benefits: *Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*<sup>Ps.103:1-3</sup> *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*<sup>Ps.42:11</sup> *God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and for godliness. This power was given to us through knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and integrity. Because of this, make every effort to add to your faith integrity, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, Christian affection and love. If you have these qualities and they are increasing, it demonstrates that your knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ is living and productive. If these qualities aren't present in your life, you're short-sighted and have forgotten that you were cleansed from your past sins.*<sup>2Pet.1:3-9</sup>

**Man has a Relationship with God.** The likeness between man and God makes it possible for man to have a unique friendship with God. Adam had this relationship with God and God expected to find Adam in the garden where He could walk and talk with him: *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*<sup>Gen.3:8-10</sup>

**Man Rebelled against God:** Man is desperately fallen and needs God Himself to take action. God had made a perfect place for us to live and gave Himself to man in a special friendship. Man betrayed that friendship and rebelled, causing the Kingdom to break. Now we live in a broken world with broken relationships – which is why there is evil in the world. The Christian story (which is the Story of Reality) explains how mankind's relationship with God was broken but it also explains how it can be restored.



Man broke the world through his rebellion when he sinned against the holy God. And now the King is angry. God is holy and just and could have demanded recompense immediately but chose not to. Instead, He chose to initiate a rescue plan: *God's gift is different from Adam's sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But it was even more sure that God's grace would also come through one man. That man is Jesus Christ. God's gift of grace was more than enough for the whole world. The result of God's gift is different from the result of Adam's sin. God judged one sin. That brought guilt. But after many sins, God's gift made people right with him. One man sinned, and death ruled because of his sin. But we are even more sure of what will happen because of what the one man, Jesus Christ, has done. Those who receive the rich supply of God's grace will rule with Christ in his kingdom. They have received God's gift and have been made right with him. One man's sin brought guilt to all people. So also one right act made all people right with God. And all who are right with God will live. Many people were made sinners because one man did not obey. But one man did obey. That is why many people will be made right with God.*<sup>Rom.5:15-19</sup>

One of the main differences between man and the rest of Creation is man's ability to make moral choices, and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King, his Maker. That resulted in a rift in the kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the conflict. However, this is only part of the Story and the Story is not over yet because God has initiated a rescue plan by coming to earth Himself to rescue humanity. Over the next few weeks, we will explore how that conflict is resolved and see the conclusion of this **Story of Reality**.

### The Story of Reality 3. Jesus.

We have seen that the Christian story starts with **God**, that He is the main Character of Christianity, not us and that Christianity is about God's Kingdom – the rulership of Jesus. Then we saw that **Man** is both physical and spiritual. We are the highest of all of Creation because we are made in God's image and unlike any other creature, we are God-conscience. We can make moral choices and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King and Maker. That resulted in a rift in God's kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and so those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the conflict. This week we are looking at the next part of the Christian story: **Jesus**.

**Jesus is a real human being.** Jesus was the son of Mary and it was His conception that was super-natural rather than His birth: *But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. He will rule forever over his people, who came from Jacob's family. His kingdom will never end."*<sup>Lk.1:30-33</sup> As Jesus grew up, He developed like other children: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*<sup>Lk.2:52</sup> To the people who met Jesus, He seemed to be just another person **until** He began His ministry when His wisdom and miracles confronted them: *"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given to him? He even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son? Isn't this the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" They were not pleased with him at all.*<sup>Mk.6:2-3</sup> Although fully human, **Jesus is also fully God.**

*In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth.*<sup>Jn.1:1-14</sup> This is the **Incarnation** (from Latin *incarnatio*) - the **Word becoming flesh**.

**We call this union of God and Man in Jesus** the **Hypostatic Union**, which means: *humanity added to God*. In the one person of Jesus the Messiah, there are two natures: His undiminished deity and His true humanity. Jesus did not come from heaven as a man but a child who had to grow and develop like other children. He ate, drank and slept and was human in every respect BUT He was more than just human – Jesus was also God. Jesus added humanity to His divine nature – He was (and is) God-Man.

This dual nature of Jesus was prophesied by Isaiah: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*<sup>Is.9:6</sup> It is also prophesied by Micah: *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*<sup>Mi.5:2</sup> Although God is the Father of Jesus: *You are my Son; today I have become your Father... I will be his Father and he will be my Son*<sup>Heb.1:5</sup> and He is called God's "*only begotten Son,*"<sup>Jn.3:16</sup> God the Father and God the Son have always pre-existed (as has God the Holy Spirit): *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.*<sup>Jn.1:1</sup>

Early in the C4<sup>th</sup> an Elder in Alexandria, Egypt named Arius denied that Jesus was fully God and taught that God the Father, in the beginning, created (or begot) the Son.

A Council was set up in Nicea (in modern-day north west Turkey) to resolve the dispute and they drafted a Creed that we now know as the Nicene Creed. This includes: *We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.* Arius' heresy is still seen today in the JW's and Mormons' teaching. An example that helps to illustrate the distinctiveness and yet the Oneness of God the Father and God the Son is the sun and light. Light is derived from the sun, yet the light and the sun exist simultaneously. Just so, the Son exists because the Father exists, but there was never a time before the Father produced the Son. We can know the sun only through the rays of light that it emits - to see the sunlight is to see the sun. Jesus says, *He who has seen me has seen the Father.*<sup>Jn.14:9</sup>

Another controversy that has brought confusion is the **Kenosis** or "emptying". *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.*<sup>Phil.2:6-8</sup> Some Versions translate "made himself nothing" as "emptied himself" which can be misleading because although the Greek word means "empty" it also means "to give up status and privilege." Jesus did not become less than God nor did He "give up" some divine **attributes**; but rather He gave up His divine **privileges** that were rightly His as king of the universe, to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross. Jesus had every right to stay comfortably in heaven in a position of power, but His love drove Him to a position of weakness for the sake of sinful mankind. Jesus never ceased being God; He laid aside only His *privileges* of deity, not His *nature* of deity.



So when Jesus became Human, He “*made Himself nothing*” by giving up His privileges not by giving up any part of His true deity. **Jesus is as much Human is if He were not God and as much God as if He were not Human.**

These four statements must be understood and affirmed in order to attain a complete biblical picture of the person of Jesus Christ:

- 1. Jesus Christ is fully and completely divine.**
- 2. Jesus Christ is fully and completely human.**
- 3. The divine and human natures of Christ are distinct.**
- 4. The divine and human natures of Christ are completely united in one Person.**

**Why did Jesus come and what did He come to do?** Jesus did not come to earth for social justice or to help the poor. No! He came mainly to solve man’s problem: to rescue us and save us. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*<sup>Lk.19:10</sup> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*<sup>Mk.10:45</sup> A ransom is paid to bring people out of slavery and mankind is in slavery to sin and satan. Only a free man can set a slave free and Jesus came as a Free Man to set us free. He did for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves. Jesus rescues us from our imminent danger and our danger is from the Father! The Father, the King, is angry because of the man’s rebellion – and properly so! *I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*<sup>Lk.12:4-5</sup> *The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*<sup>Heb.10:30-31</sup>

**What did Jesus ultimately do to rescue us?** Jesus lived the life we should have lived. Jesus lived the perfect life without any sin or rebellion.



*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... but we have [a high priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*<sup>Heb.4:14-16</sup> Then Jesus made a trade - His life for ours. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.<sup>2Cor.5:21</sup> This trade-off was at a place called *The Skull* or *Calvary* where God the Father laid on Jesus our sin. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*<sup>Is.53:5</sup>

Next week we will see how the conflict between mankind and God was resolved on the Cross. But today let's worship Jesus like Peter who said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."<sup>Matt.16:16</sup>

## **The Story of Reality 4. Cross.**

We have seen the Christian Story unravel as we look at the basic ingredients of our faith: **God, man, Jesus, cross** and the **final resurrection**. We saw that the Christian story is the story of Reality – how we see the world – and it is not about us but about God – **In the beginning, God...** We saw how mankind is special and distinct from all creation because God made us in His image. Mankind is the highest of all creation because we are spirit, have a soul and live in a body. We were made to worship God but when man rebelled against Him, he broke that special relationship with God. However, instead of demanding immediate justice, God devised a plan to rescue us and restore us.

God became human when Jesus (the Word of God) was born of Mary. Only a perfect Person could save the imperfect human race from the wrath of God against sin. And this happened upon the **Cross at Calvary**. So this is the fourth part of the Story: the **Cross** and this is the place where Jesus exchanged our sins for His Righteousness.

In Roman times when criminals were crucified, a parchment “*certificate of debt*” describing the crimes they were convicted of, was nailed to the cross to publicly display their crime. When the punishment was completed, Caesar’s court cancelled the debt with a single Greek word stamped upon the parchment. And that word was *tetelestai* - meaning **finished, paid in full**. Jesus was born *King of the Jews*<sup>Matt.2:2</sup> and died with the “*certificate of debt*” to Caesar nailed to the cross, which stated: “*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*”<sup>Jn.19:19</sup> However, sedition - being *king of the Jews* - was not the crime that Jesus paid for! Hidden to all but the Father was another certificate nailed to that cross: **sin**. **It was our sin that was nailed to Jesus’ cross:** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*<sup>Col.2:13-15</sup> **Jesus’ crime was our sin**, because He was made sin for us: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*<sup>2Cor.5:21</sup> *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*<sup>1Jn.3:5</sup> *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*<sup>Is.53:5-6</sup>

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*<sup>1Pet.2:25</sup> Jesus finished the work His Father had given Him to do. He knew that everything was now finished. He knew that what Scripture said must come true... After Jesus drank he said, **"It is finished."** Then he bowed his head and died.<sup>Jn.19:28-30</sup> So when Jesus died saying "it is finished" (Tetelestai) it was not a dying gasp. **Jesus died with a cry of completion and the voice of victory because the price of our sins had been paid in full.** Yes, the cross makes peace – peace with God Himself: *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*<sup>Col.1:20</sup>

When we accept God's trade-off of our sins for Jesus' righteousness, it is not just an academic acknowledgment of the facts but a restoration of proper ownership of our lives – we **confess that Jesus is Lord.**<sup>Rom.10:9-10</sup> Remember, if you make something, you get to keep it because it's yours. God made us and now we are His – doubly His - by creation and by new-creation: *I am created by God, I am His. I am redeemed by God, I am His. I am twice His, by original right and by purchase. I belong to God!* When we realise that God is our rightful owner and we make *Jesus is Lord*<sup>Rom.10:9-10</sup> our confession, our life takes on a new dimension. *As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.*<sup>Gal.6:14</sup>

As we make God's kingdom our priority, our new spiritual life with God then takes priority over our old natural life. *And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.*

*If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*<sup>Matt.6:28-34</sup>

We then begin to realize that our flesh (that is, our old self, our natural self) **has already been crucified** (not *is being* crucified or *will be* crucified). This was an actual event in history – His story – because our old self was crucified **with** Christ. *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*<sup>Gal.2:20</sup> So now it is time to stop acting like *mere humans*<sup>1Cor.3:3</sup> and start living like *sons of God*.<sup>Ps.82:6-7</sup>

The Israelites were forbidden to return to Egypt: *He must not make the people return to Egypt... The LORD has told you, “You must not go back there again.”*<sup>Deut.17:16</sup> In the Bible, Egypt is a picture of the world (i.e. our old natural life that is enslaved to the principles of this world which is under the devil’s control). *That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*<sup>Rev.12:9</sup> *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*<sup>1Jn.5:18-20</sup>

Although the Israelites did not physically return to Egypt, they did return there in their hearts: *Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.*<sup>Acts.7:39</sup> They yearned for the temporary benefits but forgot the cost – which was sickness, sadness and slavery, disease disappointment, despair and death.

*And the people of Israel also began to complain. “Oh, for some meat!” they exclaimed. “We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted. But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!”*<sup>2Nu.11:4-6</sup>

### **An Egypt experience is no different from living in Egypt!**

Although we may not physically return to our pre-Christian way of life, if we think the same as we did before we were Christians it is no different from being in the world! We have been given a saved mind: *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (literally a saved mind).*<sup>2Tim.1:7</sup> We must train ourselves to think “*saved*” and to act “*saved*”; to think “*I belong to God*” and to act “*I belong to God*”. We train ourselves by *renewing* our minds *re-vocabulising* our mouths! In other words, we make our lips do their duty and fill them with the Word of God. We make our lips say what God says about our situation and don’t allow them to say anything to the contrary. *You have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth.*<sup>Prov.6:2</sup> We don’t have to be weird or cranky by quoting *verbatim* large passages of Scripture but we must make our conversations agree with the spirit of the Scripture. Life isn’t fair - bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people but we must remain faithful to God, to His Kingdom and to His people.



Only praise should come from our lips, that is we must say good words and especially good words about God: *Here is what sinful people are like. They don't have a care in the world. They keep getting richer and richer. It seems as if I have kept my heart pure without any reason. It didn't do me any good to wash my hands to show that I wasn't guilty of doing anything wrong. Day after day I've been in pain. God has punished me every morning. What if I had said, "I will speak as evil people do"? Then I wouldn't have been faithful to God's children.*<sup>Ps.73:12-15</sup>

But if we do fail or falter then we should run **to** God not run **from** Him because it is only God who can help us, save us and sanctify us: *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*<sup>Heb.4:16</sup>

Yes, Jesus exchanged our curses for His blessings; our sin for His righteousness; our punishment for His forgiveness; our death for His life; our poverty for His riches. And Jesus did this on the cross. That's why the Cross is such an important part of the Christian Story. **So let's re-affirm the great transaction of Jesus exchanging our sins for His Righteousness – then live in the benefits!**

### **The Story of Reality 5. Final Resurrection.**

For a good story you have to have a **beginning**, a **conflict** which has to be **resolved** and then the story ends: *"They lived happily ever after."* These are essential parts of all good stories. The Christian story has those elements as well. The **Beginning: creation**; the **Problem: the fall**; the **Solution: redemption**; and the **Resolution: the final resurrection**. Here is the way the story goes for Christianity. There is a personal God who created everything else out of nothing. *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."*

He made it all. He is the king over that which He's made. That's what a *kingdom* is: a "king" and a "dom." He created man as a unique being, different from everything else. He made man especially valuable, in that man bears God's image in some deep and profound way. One aspect is man's ability to make moral choices, and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King, his Maker. That resulted in a rift in the kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the **conflict**. The **solution** is that God acted to become a man Himself in Jesus to rescue man by giving Himself as a payment for the crimes man committed. This is what Theologians call *substitutionary* (or *vicarious*) *atonement*. In the person of Jesus, God paid to rescue man. And those who respond to the offer of pardon by putting their trust in Jesus the **God-Man**, receive a complete pardon which they didn't deserve - and that's an act of mercy and grace. However, the story does not end there because there is the **resolution** to the Story, which is **the final Resurrection**. **The good news** about the **final resurrection** is that **everyone lives for ever!** And **the bad news** about the **final resurrection** is that **everyone lives for ever!** Our story of reality does not end with: "*they all lived happily ever after*" because there is a coming day of judgement where the righteous will rise to eternal life and the unrighteous will rise to eternal punishment. (*Eternity will not be like a thousand years, followed by another thousand years, and then another thousand years. No! Eternity is outside of time and so it will be like now - but without ever ending.*) Note that all human beings will be raised from the dead as imperishable and immortal: *the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*<sup>1Cor.15:53</sup> All who have received mercy in Christ will receive their eternal reward.

All those who have rejected God's mercy in Christ will be judged for what they have done and receive their eternal punishment. *But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world... Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.'*<sup>Matt.25:31-46</sup>

Those who humble themselves, surrender to God and submit to the Righteous King will receive **perfect mercy** because they have accepted God's forgiveness. It will be as God had originally intended for us to live – in perfect harmony, peace and joy, for ever and for ever. But those who those who refuse God's forgiveness and continue in their rebellion will receive **perfect justice** in their punishment for every sin they have committed against their rightful owner. Now immortal human beings, they will be banished forever to a place of punishment, torment, and interminable isolation from God for their crimes - and the torment is real and terrible. Both conditions – peace or punishment - last for eternity, for ever and for ever. These are the two options that we are faced with in the final resurrection: **perfect mercy or perfect justice** but the choice is made now!

God is Spirit,<sup>Jn.4:24</sup> and His Spirit is eternal. *But Christ offered himself to God without any flaw. He did this through the power of the eternal Holy Spirit.*<sup>Heb.9:14</sup> This means that our spirit (the God-conscious part of us that was originally made in God's image) is also eternal: *He has also set eternity in the human heart,*<sup>Ecc.3:11</sup>

Angels are also spirit: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*<sup>Heb.1:14</sup> Spirit is not matter and so it is eternal - it cannot be annihilated or destroyed. That is why angels and humans live forever. Humans have bodies which are mortal and they will completely perish when we die but our spirit does not perish and we will be clothed with an immortal body at the final resurrection. *For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*<sup>2Cor.5:1-10</sup>

The devil is a created spirit, similar to God's angels and so he cannot be annihilated either: *One day angels came to the LORD. Satan also came with them.*<sup>Job.1:6</sup> When the devil and his demons (possibly a third of heaven's angels) rebelled against God, they were cast down from heaven: *How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning!*<sup>Is.14:12</sup> *Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth... Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.*

*The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*<sup>Rev.12:4-9</sup> So God has prepared hell as a place of containment for the devil and his angels. *God didn't spare angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, where he has secured them with chains of darkness and is holding them for judgment.*<sup>2Pet.2:4</sup> *And the devil... was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, [and] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*<sup>Rev.20:10</sup> Hell was made for the devil, not people **BUT** hell will be the final destination of those who continue in their rebellion against God. *Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*<sup>Matt.25:41</sup>

So the Christian story has five main elements: **God, man, Jesus, the cross, the final resurrection**. It's a story that can be told in single a sentence: **God**, the Creator of the universe, created **man** to fellowship with Him but he rebelled and in order to rescue man from punishment for his rebellion God took on humanity in **Jesus**, the Saviour to die on a **cross** and rise from the dead so that in the **final resurrection**, we could enjoy a wonderful friendship with our Sovereign Lord, in the kind of perfect world our hearts have always yearned for. But it's not just a story, it's a true story - the story of reality. Does it really matter if we understand this story of reality? Have you ever had a salesman try to sell you something that you really don't need? How much time do you give that salesman? How much do you really pay attention to what he is saying? On the other hand, if this man offered you something that you desperately needed, you would listen intently to what he had to say! We need a proper understanding of our world so that we can have a correct understanding of our spiritual need. And it is this understanding that shapes our love and awe of God, our gratitude for Salvation and our love of the Saviour. But because the conflict has truly been resolved, we can be sure that **our** story will end: "*They lived happily ever after.*"