



Two Ways to Live: Study 4

Jesus' Death

Last week we saw how our relationship with God has changed since he first created us. This week we'll look at **Box 4** of the Two Ways to Live outline to see how Jesus came to save us from the situation we've put ourselves in.

Take time now to practice saying the text and Bible verses of Boxes 1 to 4.



Box 4 really represents the heart of the bible (well, together with Box 5, but that's next week!). There are many passages we could study to see how it's expressed in the Bible, but this week we'll take a brief look at one of the Gospels.

One of the best ways to take someone further in their investigation of Jesus is to read through and discuss a Gospel with them over a few weeks. The brief study we'll do now is a small example of how to do that, building up an answer to 2 questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. What did he come to do?

The Gospel of Mark is a dynamic biography of Jesus with a strong focus not only on Jesus' life and teaching but also on the events leading up to and including his death and resurrection. As each event is related, Jesus' identity and mission is gradually clarified, and we're eventually brought to see the truths that make up Box 4 of the Two Ways to Live outline.

Read the following highlights together: Mark 1.1-20, 1.40-2.12, 3.1-6, 4.35-41

Who is Jesus?

a) How did God view Jesus? (1.11) How does this contrast with the relationship between God and humanity we saw last week?

b) How did Jesus act toward others? (1.41, 3.4-5) How does this contrast with the actions and attitudes of humanity we looked at last week?

Jesus was the *true* human. He was the one who lived as all humans should: in obedience to God, pleasing him, showing compassion for others and confronting (not approving) the rejection of God and lack of compassion in others.

Box 4 of the Two Ways to Live outline summarises this saying “Jesus always lived under God’s rule.” But how could this be? How could Jesus be so different?

c) John was a prophet sent by God. How did he regard Jesus? (1.7)

d) What does it say about Jesus’ identity that he could forgive sins? (2.5-12)

e) Jesus calmed a storm by rebuking the wind and waves and his disciples wondered “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (4.41) What’s the answer to their question?

Psalm 104.7 describes God creating the world by saying:
*At your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder
they took to flight.*



As Mark (and the whole New Testament) unfolds, it becomes clear that Jesus is actually both human and *God*. How could Jesus be the only one who lived as all humans should? Because he is God become human.

f) What problems does it raise to think that Jesus is both God and human?

How can God, the creator of humanity, become a human like the ones he created? And how can Jesus, who is God become human, actually relate to God as someone separate, as someone he should obey? When talking to others about Jesus, it’s important to remember that the Bible hasn’t told us exactly *how* Jesus can be both God and human. We can’t understand his nature completely and we should be comfortable admitting that we can’t. But does this leave a problem? Does this mean that Christianity doesn’t make any sense?

We don’t normally draw this conclusion when we encounter such problems in other fields. For example, modern scientists are still struggling to solve some crucial problems in quantum physics. What if they never solve them? Would that mean all the results of science are *wrong* or just that there’s some parts we can’t understand?

Perhaps it’s even less of an issue when we realise that we shouldn’t *expect* to completely understand the nature of God and Jesus. We are different to God and so we can’t understand him completely. In a similar way, no one would expect other animals to understand everything about us! What is true of humanity isn’t limited to what other creatures can understand about us, and what is true of God in Jesus isn’t limited to what we can understand about him.

It’s actually good that the bible doesn’t invent an easy ‘Jesus’ who poses no difficulties. It says Jesus is human and Jesus is God, whether or not we can understand that, because that’s the way it was and is.



Box 4 of the Two Ways to Live outline uses a common title for Jesus, calling him God's *Son*. The title 'Son' expresses it well because Jesus came from God as a human like us, but unlike us the family resemblance with God is total, everything that is true of God is true of him.

So, there's something here that we can't understand. But we shouldn't let that stop us from receiving what we *can* understand. In fact, knowing that Jesus is both human and God (even though we don't know exactly *how*) is important for understanding the way he accomplished what he came to do...

What did Jesus come to do?

- a) When Jesus began preaching, his message was "The kingdom of God is near". (1.15) What do you think he meant?

Jesus came to re-establish the good rule of God over humanity: the kingdom of God. He is the Christ (Mark 1:1), the king of God's kingdom and he called people to follow him (1:16-20). The first part of restoring God's good rule over humanity was calling people to acknowledge God's rule by following Jesus. The other part was taking away the judgements that we receive from God. Initially Jesus did this by rescuing people from: illnesses (1:41-42), disabilities (2:10-12, 3:5) and natural disasters (4.39) which we saw last week are forms of God's judgement. He reversed the curses. But ultimately, Jesus came to address the cause of these judgements.....

- b) When the friends of the paralyzed man brought him to Jesus (2.1-4), what would they have thought was their friend's real need?

- c) What did Jesus think was the man's real need? (2.5) Why?

Jesus could reverse the curse in a few cases during his lifetime, but these were only a few examples of God's judgement. There still remained the *final* judgement. So the real need to address was the *cause* of the judgement: our sinfulness before God. Jesus came to bring forgiveness of sin.

So, to summarise, Jesus taught people that the good rule of God over humanity was being restored ("The kingdom of God is near") and so they should repent. He reversed the curses of God against humanity to signal the end of hostility and he forgave the sin which caused the hostility.

But... there were still some problems in the plan as just summarised:

1. Most people didn't repent and follow Jesus! Just as God was rejected by humanity, so Jesus was rejected by many.
2. To simply forgive our sin, instead of punishing it, would be unjust. God's judgement against us is for a *reason*: our rebellion against him. So we *deserve* to be punished, not simply forgiven.

Surprisingly, it was the first problem which led to the solution of the second...

Read Mark 8.27-31; 10:32-34; 10:45

Amazingly, Jesus being rejected and killed was not against his mission, it was actually the heart of his mission. It was so central that he soon withdrew from teaching and healing, explaining to his disciples again that he really came to die (9.30-32). He then relentlessly pursued the path to Jerusalem, explaining to his disciples that this was where he'd be arrested and killed (10.32-34).

d) From last week, why did God sentence humanity to death?

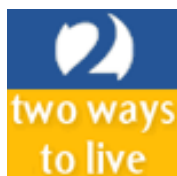
e) Who was Jesus' death for? (10.45)



f) How could Jesus die for others? Why didn't he die for his own sin like everyone else? (1.11)

g) Why do you think Jesus' death alone was enough to count as the punishment for many?

Jesus was the true human who did not reject God but obeyed him, the only human who did not deserve to die! Because he was not only the true human but God himself, Jesus' life was even more precious than all of ours put together. But by dying, he took the punishment owed to many. He died taking the punishment for our sin. God is now justified in forgiving us for our sin. He hasn't unjustly ignored it, he has punished it in the death of Jesus.



Box 4 refers to this saying "By dying in our place he took our punishment and brought forgiveness."

Thinking it through

In Box 4 of the Two Ways to Live outline we come to the heart of the Christian message, the part that really distinguishes Christianity from any other view of the world.

What do we lose from this message if we don't say Jesus is and was God?

What do we lose if we don't say Jesus is and was human?



How would you respond to the following statement?

"I don't like to think Jesus died to take the punishment for our sin, it sounds too harsh and legal. I prefer to think that the point of his death was to give an *example* of sacrificial love for us all to follow. We get back into relationship with God simply by following his example of sacrificial love."

For next week

Revise the diagrams. Revise the statements and bible verses of Boxes 1 to 5.

Try to **memorise the statement and bible verse of Box 6** in the Two Ways to Live outline.

We have now seen that God has responded to our rebellion in two ways. Firstly, he responded in anger against us (Box 3). Secondly, he responded in love, taking his anger away from us, enduring the punishment for our sin himself in the death of Jesus (Box 4).

Next week we'll look at how God demonstrated that our punishment was really finished and the kind of response he wants to see from us now.