

LIFE LET'S TALK EXPLORED

stmatthew'schurch

Week 1. Introduction

Tell us about yourself or your family, and something that makes you happy.

Talk:

Aims

- We want you to feel comfortable.
- We want to use your time well.
- We want to talk about the big questions.

Augustine: 'You have made us for yourself Lord, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.'

'The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.'
(Mark 1:1)

Reasons for believing in God are based on:

1. Creation

- The universe had a beginning, so there ought to be a reason.
- The universe makes sense in a consistent, logical way.
- The universe is just right for humanity to exist.
- The universe is too complex to come about by chance alone.

2. Conscience

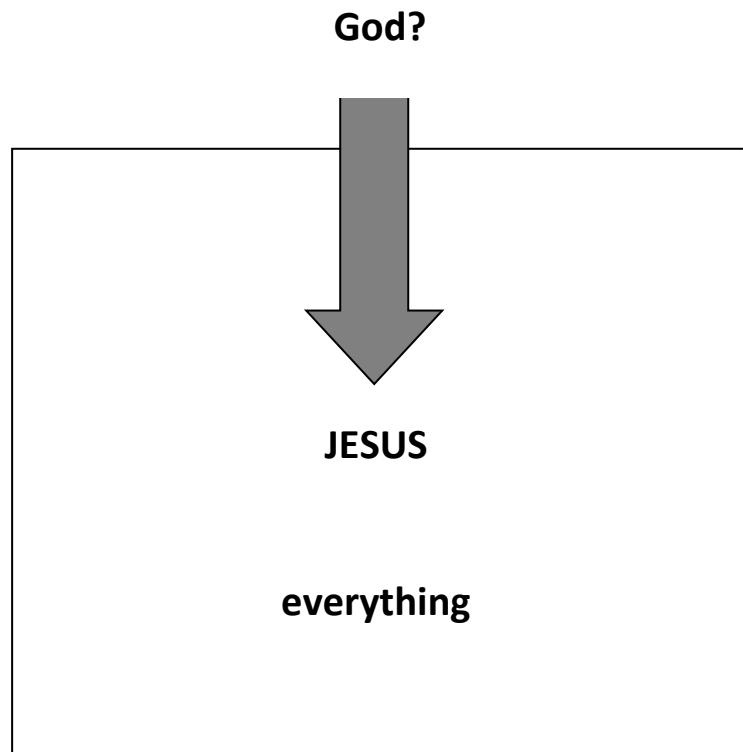
- People experience good/evil as 'ought to' not 'prefer to.'
- People long for eternity and need meaning.
- People have an instinct to worship something greater.
- People experience love as something real.

3. Christ

Christ has changed many lives for the better.

Evidence for Christ in history and the Bible.

God came into our world as one of us.



'Have I time to discover why I was born before I die?' Bernard Levin

Discussion:

1. Why is it worth finding out about Jesus and the Bible?
2. If you could ask God one question, what would you ask?
3. Please read or watch Mark 1 & 2 ready for next week.

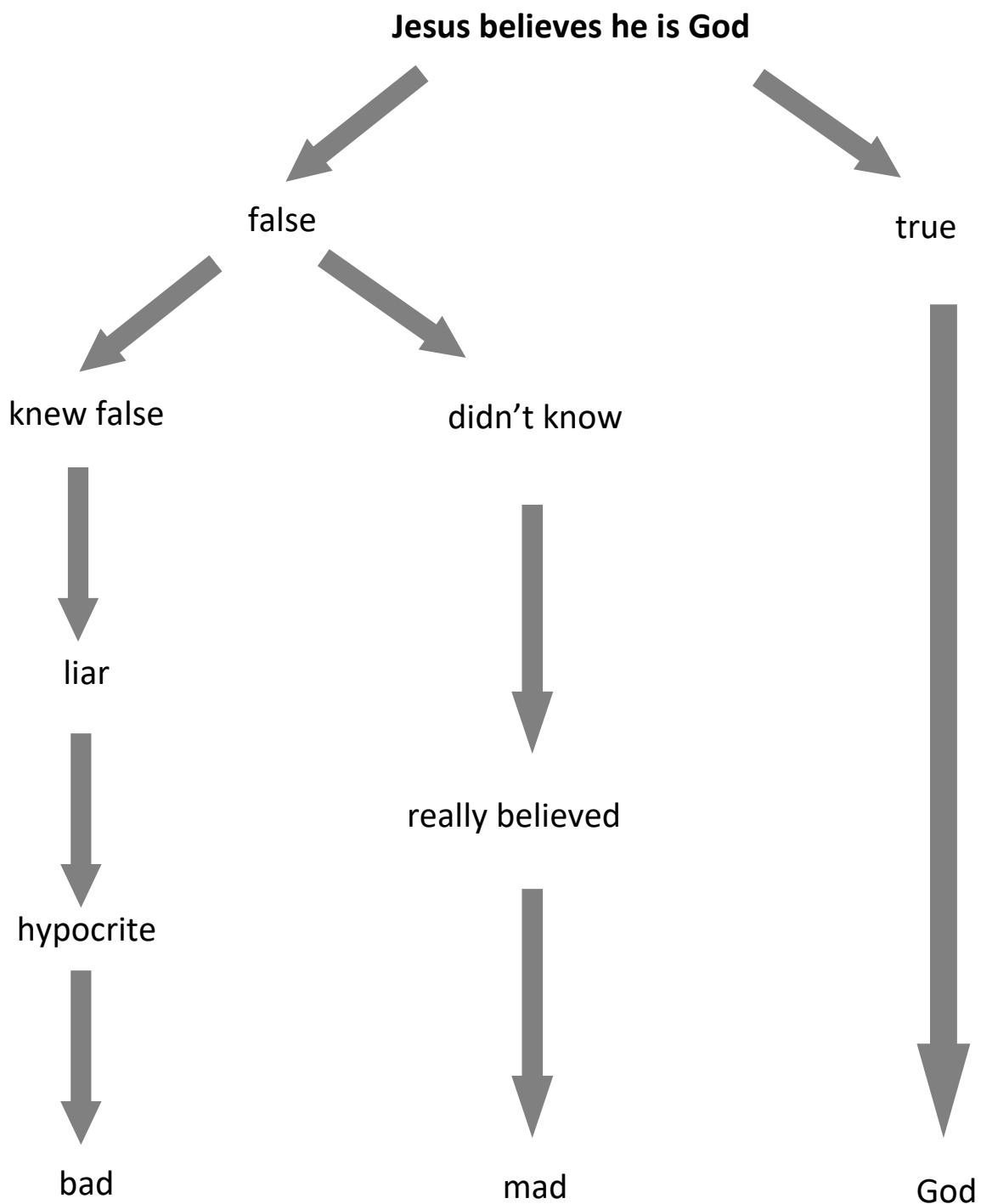
Week 2. Who is Jesus?

What were your reactions to Mark 1 and 2?

Talk:

Jesus sees himself as fully human and fully God

Mark 2:5-7, 14:61-64



As you read Mark, is the evidence about Jesus what we'd expect if he were mad, if he were bad or if he were God?

- a. His inspiring teaching Mark 1:27-28
- b. His many miracles Mark 1:32-34
- c. His fulfilment of predictions
(see next page for examples) Mark 1:2-4
- d. His outstanding character Mark 14:55-56
- e. His resurrection (session 5)

Discussion:

1. What do you think about Jesus' claim to be God?
2. How does this help answer the questions from week 1?
(or: How can we know whether God exists?)
3. Please read or watch Mark 3, 4 & 5 ready for next time.

Extra information: Predictions about Jesus

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah. Historians agree these were written hundreds of years before the time of Jesus. Yet they predict his life accurately. Here are 4 examples:

	Prophecy	Jesus' life
Place of birth	<i>'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clan 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.'</i> - Micah 5v2	Jesus was born in Bethlehem. (Matthew 2v1)
Family tree	<i>'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will raise up from David's line a righteous Branch...This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.'</i> - Jeremiah 23v5-6	Jesus was a descendant of David. (Luke 2v4-7)
Blood money	<i>I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'— the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord.</i> - Zechariah 11v12-13	Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for thirty silver coins. Later Judas threw the money into the temple and left, and the priests decided to use the money to buy a potter's field. (Matthew 26v15, 27v5-7)
Gambling over clothes	<i>They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.</i> - Psalm 22v18	While Jesus was being crucified, soldiers gambled for his clothes by casting lots. (Matthew 27v35)

Week 3. Why did Jesus come?

What were your reactions to Mark 3, 4 & 5?

Talk:

Why should God let me into heaven?

Wrong answers: What I have done

Right answer: What Jesus has done.

Jesus came because:

1. Our hearts are the problem. *Mark 7: 18-23 & 12:30*

2. Our punishment is serious. *Mark 9: 43-47*

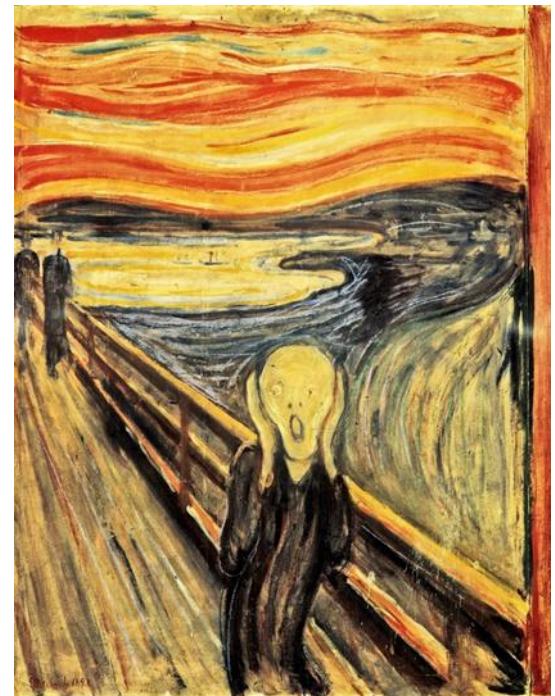
3. Our rescue is needed. *Mark 10: 26-27*

Discussion:

1. What do you think about Jesus' teaching about human wickedness & hell?
2. How does this help answer the questions from week 1?
(or How can God allow suffering?)
3. Please read or watch Mark 6, 7 & 8 ready for next time.

Extra information: Why does God allow suffering?

1. Most suffering is caused by human violence, greed, or selfishness. But that is not always the reason, according to Jesus. (John 9:1-2).
2. Suffering came into the world because humanity turned away from God who is the source of all good. That broken relationship with God damaged creation, causing sickness and disasters. (Romans 8:18-25).
3. God is not distant or indifferent. He became one of us and shared our pain. Jesus wept, felt overwhelmed, was betrayed, humiliated, tortured and executed. (Hebrews 2:9).
4. God sometimes uses suffering to help people in the longer term, for example to discipline and strengthen those he loves, making us more like Jesus. (Hebrews 12:7-11, Romans 5:3-5).
5. God sometimes uses suffering to wake people up to how bad things are without God and how much we need him. Sometimes it is the only way for God to get us to listen to him. (Luke 13:1-5).
6. God can bring an end to suffering but that means bringing an end to all those responsible. He is delaying that, to give us time and opportunity to hear about Jesus and turn back to God. (2 Peter 3:9).
7. God offers to rescue us when we die and bring us to eternal life where all wrongs are undone, and all sadness is gone. Eternity is a long time. We will look back and feel it was worthwhile. (Revelation 21:1-5).
8. Even if it doesn't make sense from our limited human perspective, an all-knowing God might have reasons we can't grasp. We can't know all the reasons, but we can know the God who does. (Isaiah 55:8-9).



Week 4. Why did Jesus die?

What were your reactions to Mark 6, 7 & 8?

Talk:

Three details in Mark's account help explain why Jesus died:

a. **The cloud:** God was angry

Mark 15:33

b. **The cry:** Jesus was rejected

Mark 15:34 (see also Mark 10:45, 14:24)

c. **The curtain:** We can be accepted

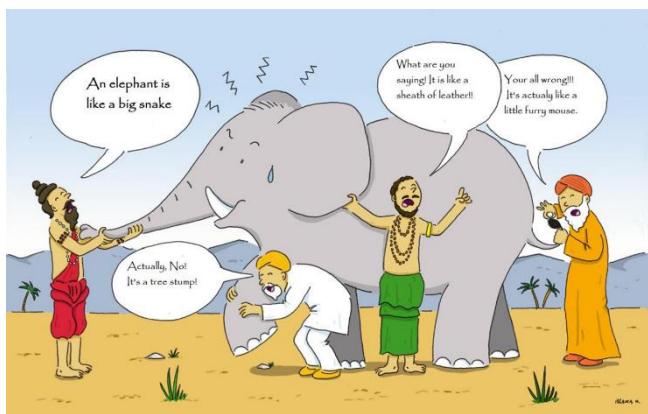
Mark 15:37-38

Discussion:

1. According to Mark, why did Jesus die?
2. How does this answer your questions from week 1?
(or What about other religions?)
3. Please read or watch Mark 9 & 10 ready for next week.

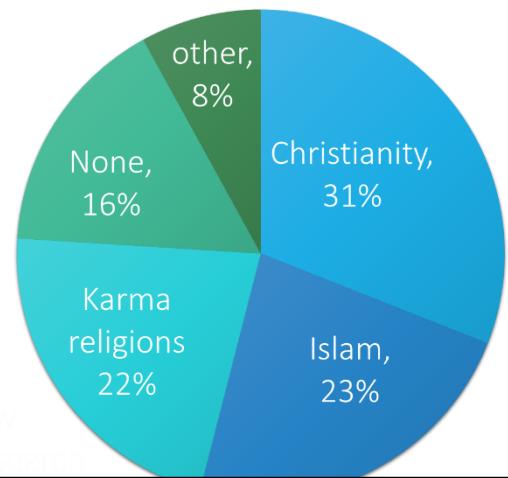
Extra information: What about other religions?

Christians expect to find wisdom, beauty and truth in other religious traditions. But we can't avoid having to choose, because religious beliefs contradict each other. For example, religions disagree about whether there is one God, many, or none, and whether the goal is heaven, oneness with the universe, or a cycle of reincarnation.



John Godfrey Saxe's poem says religions are like blind men feeling different parts of an elephant and arguing about what they've found. But this assumes all religions are blind and only the poet sees the truth. Everyone has to choose what to believe and has to say that others are wrong.

Some say religions are different paths up the same mountain. But Christianity is very different from all other religions. It is not about climbing up, it is about God coming down. All other religions teach us to be better. Hindus and Buddhists believe a good life brings karma for the next reincarnation. Muslims and Jews believe God rewards good deeds and rituals. Even atheists believe the future depends on humanity alone.



Religious affiliation in global population
Pew Research Center USA 2012

But Christianity is about 'salvation.' God sees that we won't do better. Instead of telling us to change, God comes down into our mess to die for us so we can be forgiven and receive eternal life as an undeserved gift. If Jesus is right that we can't save ourselves, then religion is not enough, we all need Jesus.

That is why Jesus said: 'I am the way the truth and the life, no one can come to the Father except through me.' (John 14:7) and the Bible says, 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no under name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12)

Week 5. Why did Jesus rise?

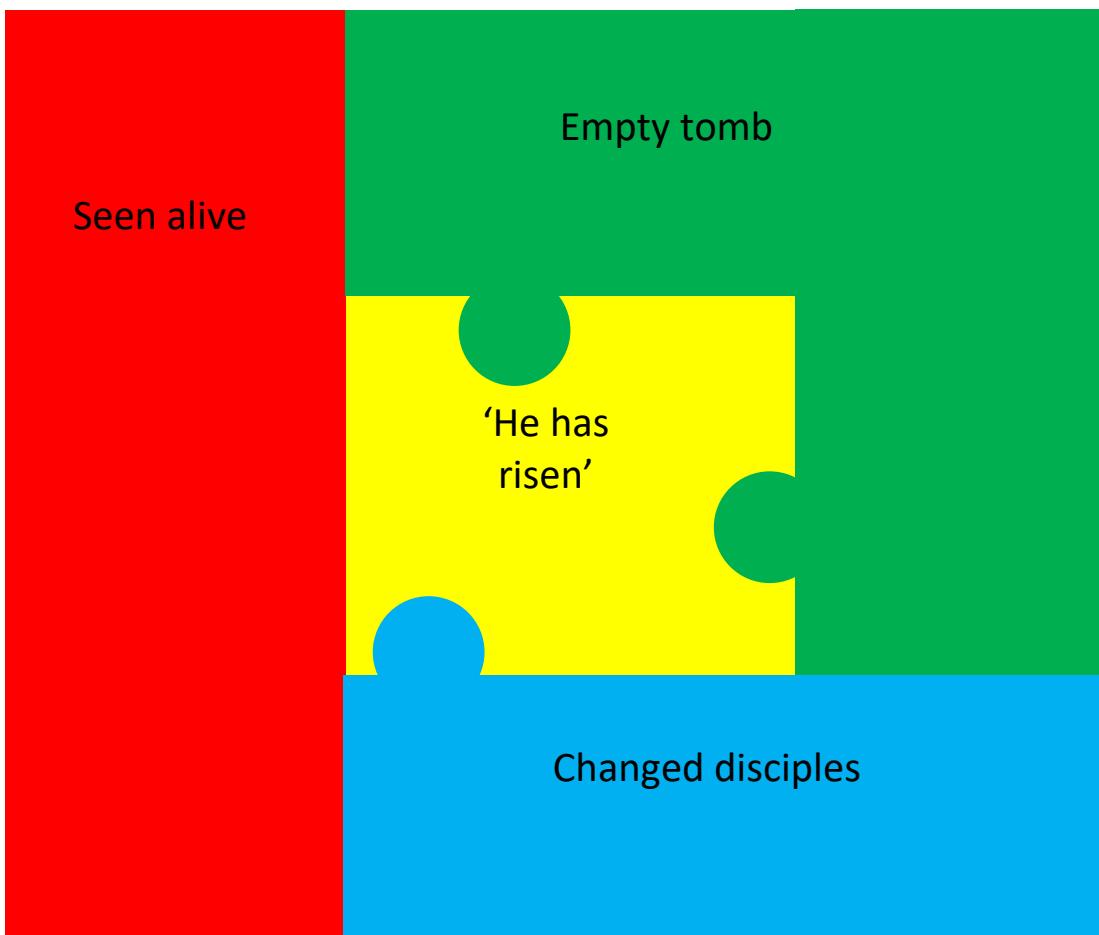
What were your reactions to Mark 9 & 10?

Talk:

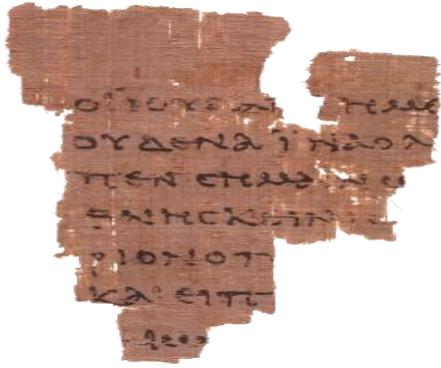
Jesus coming back from the dead:

can't be ruled out as impossible, *Mark 16:1-3*

gives the best explanation of the facts. *Mark 16:4-8*



“That Jesus’ followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgement, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experiences I do not know.”
E P Sanders, Queens College, Oxford.



The earliest surviving fragment of the New Testament at the John Rylands museum in Manchester and a page from an early complete New Testament at the British Museum in London. (See pages 11-12 for extra information.)

“The evidence for the resurrection is so strong that no-one would question it except for two things. First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it you have to change the way you live.”

Wolfhart Pannenberg, University of Munich and Harvard University

If Jesus really did come back from the dead, we have reason to believe:

1. Jesus was God
2. We need forgiveness
3. We can be forgiven
4. Death is defeated
5. The world will be made new
6. Life is worth living

Discussion:

1. Why does it matter whether Jesus really came alive again?
2. How does this help answer your questions from week 1?
(or How can we trust the Bible?)
3. Please read or watch Mark 11, 12 & 13 ready for next week.

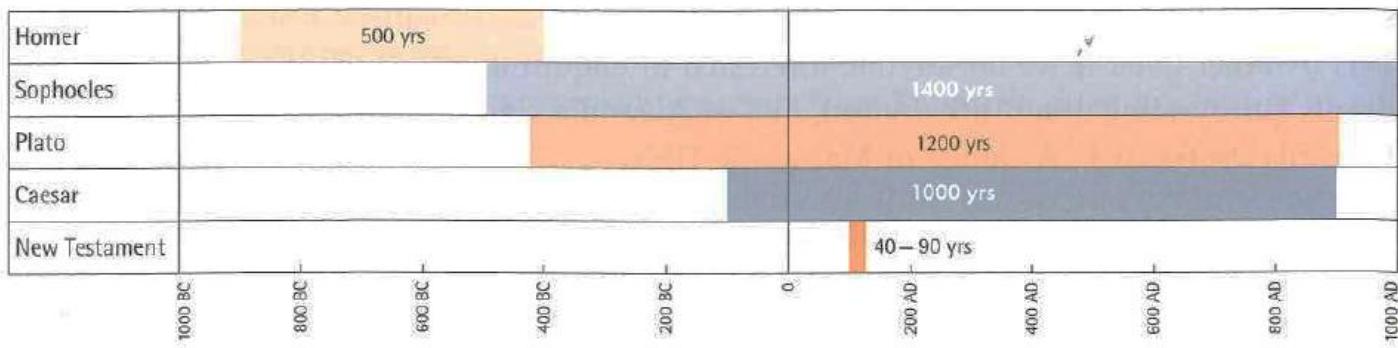
Extra information: Has the Bible been changed?

The 27 documents of the New Testament are usually dated between 40 and 100 AD. Modern Bibles include footnotes to show where there is doubt about the wording of the original text. You can check those yourself as you read and will see that very few words are in doubt, and nothing that affects any important beliefs. What we have now is almost the same as what was written at the time. Historians are confident about this for two reasons.

Firstly, the **large number** of early manuscripts. Although there are no originals, there are over 24,000 ancient copies (5,000 in the original language).

Secondly, the **closeness in time** to the original, with the earliest portions dating from around 125 AD and copies of most/all of the New Testament from around 200 AD. If that gap sounds long, it is worth comparing other ancient works such as Homer's *Iliad* or the works of Plato, Caesar or Sophocles. Modern scholars accept the authenticity of those others works, yet they do not even come close to the New Testament in either number of manuscripts or closeness in time to the original – as shown below.

	Homer	Sophocles	Plato	Caesar	New Testament
Number of copies found	643 copies	193 copies	7 copies	10 copies	24,000 copies
Time between writing and earliest surviving manuscripts	500 years later	1400 years later	1200 years later	1000 years later	40–90 years later



Sir Frederick Kenyon, former director of the British Museum puts it like this: *"The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has been removed. Both the authenticity and general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."* [F. Kenyon, The Bible and Archaeology, Harper and Row]

Extra information: Can we trust the Bible?

The New Testament includes multiple independent eye-witness accounts.

John, wrote a biography of Jesus, 3 letters and Revelation. He writes:
which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard... (1 John 1v1-3)

Peter, wrote 2 letters. The earliest records suggest that Mark translated for Peter and recorded Peter's memories of Jesus as Mark's gospel. Peter writes:
we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses (2 Peter 1v16)

Paul wrote 13 letters. Some are dated only 20 years after Jesus. Paul writes:
After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also (1 Corinthians 15v6-8)

Luke wrote a biography of Jesus and a sequel about his first followers. Luke travelled with them and gathered eye-witness accounts. He writes:
Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1v1-4)

These accounts meet the criteria secular historians use to assess reliability. For example, it was not in their interests to make it up. They were persecuted for their claims about Jesus. Execution and imprisonment was common. The writers include information even when it doesn't help their case or doesn't portray them in a flattering light. The names, dates and places fit what is known from other written sources and from archaeology. Their version of events offers the most comprehensive explanation of known facts.

Week 6. What is a real Christian?

What were your reactions to Mark 11, 12 & 13?

Talk:

A real Christian...

enters the kingdom of God

Mark 1:14-15

- God's people
- God's place
- God's presence

by **turning** from self-rule ('repent')

and **trusting** in Jesus ('believe')

because it is worth the cost.

Mark 8:34-35

Prayer:

Dear God,

I have done and said and thought things that are wrong.

I am really sorry. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me.

Thank you that he came alive again.

I give my life to Jesus as my Lord and rescuer.

Please help me to live as one of your friends. Amen

Discussion:

1. What seems difficult and what seems good about following Jesus?
2. What, if anything, stops you from wanting to follow Jesus?
3. Please read or watch Mark 14, 15 & 16 ready for next week.

Week 7. How can we keep following Jesus?

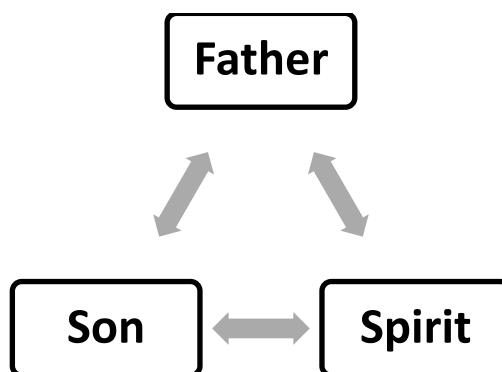
What were your reactions to Mark 14, 15 & 16?

Talk:

Following Jesus is not easy, but he has not left us to do it alone.

The Holy Spirit: God comes into our lives.

Mark 1:8-11



Prayer: We talk to God. *Mark 14:38*

The Bible: We listen to God. (see page 15 for more)
Mark 12:36 (Old Testament)
Mark 13:11 (New Testament)

Church: We follow Jesus together. *Mark 3:34*

Discussion:

1. What do you feel is helpful or difficult about prayer, the Bible and church?
2. Do you have any questions that we haven't discussed?
(or How can one God be Father, Son and Spirit?)

Where to find out more

‘Explore: Time with God’ is a booklet (also available as ‘Explore Bible app’ for your phone) with a Bible reading programme for beginners who want to read for 10 minutes at a time regularly, with questions and background information.



“**Confronting Christianity**” by Rebecca McClaughlin answers ‘12 hard questions for world’s largest religion’ including ‘**Doesn’t Christianity denigrate women?**’ ‘**How could a loving God send people to hell?**’ and ‘**Doesn’t science disprove Christianity?**’

“**A Fresh Start**” by John Chapman is a simple beginners’ book about why and how to become a Christian.

“**The reason for God**” by Tim Keller makes a rational step by step case for belief in the Christian God.

Free articles and videos for those exploring Biblical Christianity:

www.ChristianityExplored.org

www.bethinking.org

www.twowaystolive.com

Good Christian books and Bible study guides are available from:

The Good Book Company www.thegoodbook.co.uk

10 of those www.10ofthose.com

Contact us

Feel free to get in touch with questions about Christianity or the Bible at any time. The Life Explored team are always happy to meet or send a reply.
office@stmatthews.uk 01223 363545

You are welcome to visit church as little or often as you choose, on any Sunday at 10.30am or 5pm, with no commitment to keep coming.

www.stmatthews.uk

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