

The Life of Jesus

A. Jesus' Sense of Identity and Call

1. Jesus' Baptism

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:10–11; cf. Matt 3:16–17//Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32)

2. God as *Abba*

Jesus referred to God as Father—specifically, *Abba* (Mat 14:36; cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15)—and he taught his followers to do the same.

3. Jesus as God's “Son”

Jesus appears to have understood himself to be Son in a very special way—i.e., that he had a unique relationship with God. This can be seen in a number of ways:

- i. Jesus and the 12 Disciples
- ii. The Father and Son know each other (Matt 11:27)
- iii. Parable of the Vineyard (Mark 12:1–9)

4. Jesus as a Prophet

- Jesus was thought of as a prophet by others (Mark 6:15; Matt 16:14//Mark 8:28; Matt 21:11; John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), and Jesus spoke of himself as a prophet (Matt 13:57//Mark 6:4//Luke 4:24//John 4:44; Luke 13:33–34).
- As a prophet, Jesus' concern was for the restoration of Israel (Matt 15:24; Luke 22:28–30).

5. Jesus as the Messiah

- i. Jesus himself was somewhat cautious about the use of this term (Mark 8:30)
- ii. at this trial, he did accept the designation of Messiah (Mark 14:61–62)
- iii. he was crucified as a messianic pretender: “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:26)

B. Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom of God

1. The Centre of Jesus' Preaching

- i. A summary statement (Mark 1:15)
- ii. OT resonance regarding the kingdom of God
 - hope for God to establish his kingdom (Dan 2:44; Zech 12:9–11)
 - agency of an ideal king (Isa 9:7) or human representative (Dan 7:13–14)
 - announcement of God's reign and end of exile (Isa 52:7–10)
- iii. The kingdom coming through Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:16–20)
- iv. The kingdom as not yet fully arrived (Matt 6:10; 13:24–43; Mark 4:26–29)

2. Jesus' Invitation to the Kingdom

- i. An invitation to the marginalized (Matt 22:1–13//Luke 14:15–24)
- ii. A variety of responses (Mark 4:3–9, 14–20)
- iii. Determination and persistence required (Matthew 13:44–46)

3. An Invitation to Share in Jesus' Experience of God

- i. Address God as Father in prayer (Matt 6:9)
- ii. Your Father is ready to forgive you for your misdoings (Mark 11:25)
- iii. Your heavenly Father cares for his children (Matt 6:25–33; 7:9–11)
- iv. God's Fatherly care extends to all people (Matt 5:44–45)

C. The Proper Orientation for the Kingdom

1. A New Heart

The heart is the source of moral behaviour. It is our innermost self. Entry into the kingdom of God requires something more than affirming a set of beliefs and adopting a code of behaviour; it requires a conversion of one's heart (Luke 6:43–45; Matt 6:19–21).

Jesus is trying to avoid a religion of merely outward compliance without inward transformation (Matt 6:1–8, 16–18; 12:34–35; Mark 7:6–7, 14–23).

2. A Sacrificial Life

Jesus used images of death to describe what following him would look like (Mark 8:34)

Marcus Borg describes what this means in the following way:

This internal dying or death has two closely related dimensions of meaning. On the one hand, it is a dying of the self as the center of its own concern. On the other hand, it is a dying to the world as the center of security and identity. These—the self and the world—are the two great rival centers to centering in God, and the path of transformation thus involves a dying to both of them.¹

Jesus used other similar images:

- i. Gaining life and losing it (Luke 17:33)
- ii. Sharing in Jesus' cup (lot in life; Matt 20:22)
- iii. Humbling oneself (Matt 18:1–4; Luke 14:11)
- iv. Becoming last in order to become first (Mark 9:33–35)

D. The Power of the Kingdom

1. Jesus as a Healer

- Jesus was known as a healer. Jesus associated his healing activity with Isaiah's promises of new creation (Matt 11:5; cf. Isa 35:5–7).

2. Jesus as an Exorcist

- Jesus spoke of his ability to cast demons out of people as evidence of the presence of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:14–20).

3. The Recipients of Jesus' Healing

- People on the margins
- Requirement of faith (Matt 9:22, 29)

¹ Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, 112–13.

E. The Kingdom of God in Contrast to the Judaism of Jesus' Day

1. Table Fellowship

- Jesus challenged the ways many Jews excluded people on the margins by eating with the wrong kind of people (“glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners,” Matt 11:19; cf. 21:31–32)

2. Sabbath Actions

- Jesus upset a number of people—particularly those who were most insistent on how the laws were to be kept (e.g., Pharisees)—by performing several of his healings on the Sabbath.

3. Temple Clearing

- Jesus saw the Temple as a locus of the abuse of power; those responsible for its operation had perverted its true purpose. Jesus enacted a symbolic destruction of the Temple on one occasion by overturning tables (Mark 11:15–18).

4. Interpretation of Torah

- i. The most important laws: love of God and neighbour (Mark 12:29–31)
- ii. Love of neighbour over purity laws (Luke 10:30–35)
- iii. Intensifying the command (Matt 5:33–37, 38–42, 43–48)
- iv. Internalizing the command (Matt 5:21–26, 27–30)
- v. Criticism of the Pharisees (Matt 23:23; Mark 7:15, 21–23; Matt 23:27–28)

F. The Life of the Kingdom

1. Wealth

- i. Jesus warned people about the dangers of wealth (Luke 16:13–14).
- ii. His message was one of comfort to the poor and warning against the rich (Luke 6:20–26).
- iii. Jesus warned against the danger of wealth as a substitute for God (Luke 12:16–21).
- iv. Live simply: Live a life that is not cluttered with anxiety about food and clothing (Luke 12:22–31).

- v. Give to the poor: The kind of riches his disciples should be concerned about--those which will be preserved for them in heaven--can be attained, paradoxically, by giving to others (Luke 12:32-34; 19:1-10).

2. Honour

- Jesus ridiculed the honour game, exposing it as antithetical to God's kingdom (John 5:44; Luke 11:43).
- Jesus' followers are to beware of those who seek honour (Mark 12:38-40).
- True honour was to be found through humility, not through self-promotion (Luke 14:7-11).

3. Power and Authority

- Jesus called his followers to be peacemakers (Matt 5:9-12).
- Jesus advocated non-violent resistance (Matt 5:38-42).
- He warned his followers of the dangers of power (Mark 10:42-44).

G. Judgment against Israel

Jesus pronounced judgment against Israel—especially the leadership—for rejecting him (Mark 2:22; Matt 11:20-24; Mark 12:1-9, 12; Luke 13:22-30).

H. Jesus' Death

1. Jewish Perspective

Jesus offended Jewish leaders in a variety of ways:

- As a populist preacher, he associated with the wrong kind of people.
- He caused a disturbance in the temple
- He spoke against the temple
- He healed on the Sabbath
- He claimed to have an exclusive and intimate relationship with God
- According to the Jewish Talmud, Jesus was killed for leading Israel astray

2. Roman Perspective

According to the Gospel of Luke, when the Jewish authorities brought Jesus to Pilate, they raised three charges:

- Jesus was perverting the nation;
- he taught people not to pay taxes to Caesar; and
- he claimed to be the Messiah—that is, a king (Luke 23:2).

These charges were aimed at the primary concern for the Roman governor—namely, the maintaining of Roman rule and of peace.

3. Jesus' Perspective

Jesus communicated something about the significance of his death:

i. Jesus chose the time of Passover

- a time of celebration of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt
- an anticipation of the full establishment of God's kingdom as had been spoken of in the prophets

ii. Jesus had a last supper with his followers

- “the new covenant in my blood” would remind his followers both of the covenant that Moses established with Israel at Sinai (Exod 24:3–8) and of the new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of (Jer 31:31–34).