



# Why Easter?

**Nicky  
Gumbel**

Illustrated by  
Charlie  
Mackesy

Expanded Edition

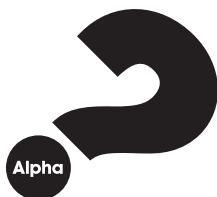
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The Easter edition of *Why Jesus?*

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Illustrations by Charlie Mackesy

# **Why Easter?**

## Why Easter?

'If you could meet any person in the past and ask just one question, whom would you meet and what question would you ask?' When asked this, Professor Joad, then Professor of Philosophy at London University, and not a Christian, answered: 'I would meet Jesus Christ and ask him the most important question in the world - "Did you or did you not rise from the dead?"'

Easter is all about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ did rise from the dead on the first Easter Day then he is alive today and we can know him.

Relationships are exciting. They are the most important aspect of our lives - our relationships with our parents, boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife, children, grandchildren, friends, and so on.



Christianity is first and foremost about relationships rather than rules. It is about a Person more than a philosophy. It is about the most important relationship of all: our relationship with the God who made us. Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God. The second is to love our neighbour. So, it is also about our relationships with other people.

## Why do we need Jesus?

You and I were created to live in a relationship with God. Until we find that relationship there will always be something missing in our lives. As a result, we are often aware of a gap. One rock singer described it by saying: 'I've got an emptiness deep inside.'

A woman, in a letter to me, wrote of 'a deep deep void'.



Another young woman spoke of 'a chunk missing in her soul'.

People try to fill this emptiness in various ways. Some try to close the gap with money, but that does not satisfy.



Aristotle Onassis, who was one of the richest men in the world, said at the end of his life: 'Millions do not always add up to what a man needs out of life.'

Others try drugs or excess alcohol or sexual promiscuity. One woman said to me, 'These things provide instant gratification but they leave you feeling hollow afterwards.' Still others try hard work, music, sport or seek success. There may not be anything wrong with these in themselves but they do not satisfy that hunger deep inside every human being.

Even the closest human relationships, wonderful though they are, do not in themselves satisfy this 'emptiness deep inside'. Nothing will fill this gap except the relationship with God for which we were made.

According to the New Testament, the reason for this emptiness is that men and women have turned their backs on God.



Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). He is the only one who can satisfy our deepest hunger because he is the one who makes it possible for our relationship with God to be restored.

## **a) He satisfies our hunger for meaning and purpose in life**

At some point everyone asks the question, 'What am I doing on earth?' or, 'What is the point of life?' or, 'Is there any purpose to life?'. As Albert Camus once said, 'Man cannot live without meaning.'



Until we are living in a relationship with God we will never find the true meaning and purpose of life. Other things may provide passing satisfaction but it does not last. Only in a relationship with our Creator do we find the true meaning and purpose of our lives.

## **b) He satisfies our hunger for life beyond death**

Before I was a Christian I did not like to think about the subject of death. My own death seemed a long way in the future. I did not know what would happen and I did not want to think about it. I was



failing to face up to reality. The fact is that we will all die. Yet God has 'set eternity in the human heart' (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Most people do not want to die. We long to survive beyond death. Only in Jesus Christ do we find eternal life. For our relationship with God, which starts now, survives death and goes on into eternity.

### **c) He satisfies our hunger for forgiveness**

If we are honest, we would have to admit that we all do things that we know are wrong. Sometimes we do things of which we are deeply ashamed. More than that, there is a self-centredness about our lives which spoils them. Jesus said, 'What comes out of you is what makes you "unclean". For from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make you "unclean"' (Mark 7:20-23).

Our greatest need, in fact, is for forgiveness. Just as someone who has cancer needs a doctor whether they realise it or not, so we need forgiveness whether we realise it or not. Just as with cancer, those who recognise their need are far better off than those who are lulled into a false sense of security.



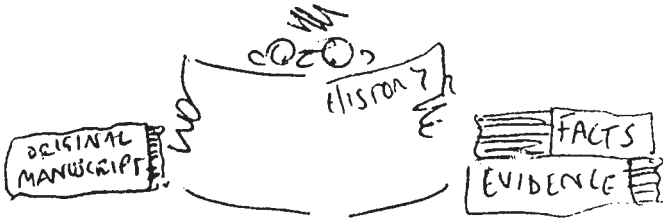
By his death on the cross Jesus made it possible for us to be forgiven and brought back into a relationship with God. In this way he supplied the answer to our deepest need.

## Why bother with Jesus?

Why should we bother with Christianity? The simple answer is because it is true. If Christianity is not true, we are wasting our time. If it is true, then it must be of vital importance to every human being.

## But how do we know it is true?

We can test the claims of Christianity because it is an historical faith. It is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is based on firm historical evidence.



## Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the most remarkable man who ever lived. He is the centrepiece of our civilisation. After all, we call what happened before him 'BC' and what happened after him 'AD'.

Jesus was and is the Son of God. Some people think he is just a 'good religious teacher'. However, that suggestion does not fit with the facts.

### **a) His claims**

Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God – on an equal footing with God. He assumed the authority to forgive sins. He said that one day he would judge the world and that what would matter then would be how we had responded to him in this life.

C. S. Lewis pointed out that: 'A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.' He would either be insane or else he would be 'the Devil of Hell'. 'You must make your choice,' he writes. Either Jesus was, and is, the Son of God or else he was insane or evil but, C. S. Lewis goes on, 'let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.'<sup>1</sup>

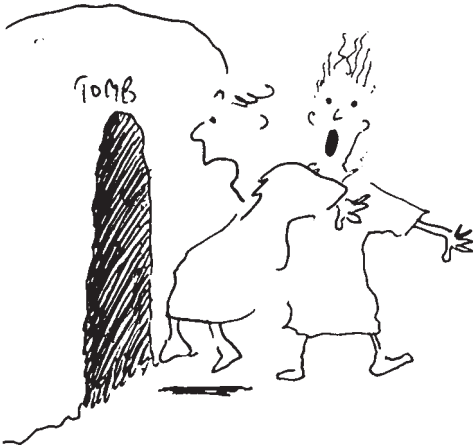
### **b) His character**

Many people who do not profess to be Christians regard Jesus as the supreme example of a selfless life. Dostoevsky, himself a Christian, said, 'I believe there is no one lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus. I say to myself, with jealous love, that not only is there no one else like him but there could never be anyone like him.'

As far as his teaching is concerned, there seems

to be general agreement that it is the purest and best ever to have fallen from human lips.

To C. S. Lewis it seemed clear that he could neither have been insane or evil and thus he concludes, 'however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God.'<sup>2</sup>



### **c) His conquest of death**

The evidence for the physical resurrection is very strong indeed. When the disciples went to the tomb on the first Easter day they found that the grave clothes had collapsed and that Jesus' body was absent.

In the next six weeks he was seen by over 500 people. The disciples' lives were transformed and the Christian Church was born, and then grew at a dynamic rate.

A former Lord Chief Justice of England, Lord Darling, said of the resurrection: 'In its favour as living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.' The only satisfactory explanation for these facts is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead and thus confirms that he was, and is, the Son of God.

## **Why did he come?**

Jesus is the only man who has ever chosen to be born and he is one of the few who has chosen to die. He said that the entire reason for his coming was to die for us. He came 'to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

From what we know of crucifixion, it was one of the cruellest forms of execution. Cicero described it as 'the most cruel and hideous of tortures'. Jesus would have been flogged with a whip of several strands of leather weighted with pieces of metal and bones. According to Eusebius, a third-century historian, 'The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews and bowels of the victim were opened to exposure.'

Jesus was then forced to carry a six-foot cross beam until he collapsed. When he reached the site of execution, six-inch nails were hammered through his wrists and feet as he was nailed to the cross. He was left to hang for hours in excruciating pain.

Yet, the New Testament makes it clear that there was something worse for Jesus than the physical and emotional pain; this was the spiritual anguish of being separated from God as he carried all our sins.

## Why did he die?

Jesus said he died 'for' us. The word 'for' means 'instead of'. He did it because he loved us and did not want us to have to pay the penalty for all the things that we



had done wrong. On the cross he was effectively saying, 'I will take all those things on myself.' He did it for you and he did it for me. If you or I had been the only person in the world he would have done it for us. St Paul wrote of 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). It was out of love for us that he gave his life as a ransom.

The word 'ransom' comes from the slave market. A kind person might buy a slave and set him free – but first the ransom price had to be paid. Jesus paid, by his blood on the cross, the ransom price to set us free.

# Freedom from what?

## a) Freedom from guilt

Whether we feel guilty or not, we are all guilty before God because of the many times we have broken his laws in thought, word and deed. Just as when someone commits a crime there is a penalty to be paid, in the same way there is a penalty for breaking God's law. 'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23).

The result of the things we do wrong is spiritual death - being cut off from God eternally. We all deserve to suffer that penalty. On the cross Jesus took the penalty in our place so that we could be totally forgiven and our guilt could be taken away.

## b) Freedom from addiction

Jesus said that 'everyone who sins is a slave to sin' (John 8:34). Jesus died to set us free from that slavery. On the cross, the power of this addiction was broken. Although we may still fall from time to time, the power of this addiction is broken when Jesus sets us free. That is why Jesus went on to say that 'if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36).



### **c) Freedom from fear**

Jesus came so that 'by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death' (Hebrews 2:14–15). We need no longer fear death.

Death is not the end for those whom Jesus has set free. Rather it is the gateway to heaven, where we will be free from even the presence of sin. When Jesus set us free from the fear of death, he also set us free from all other fears.

### **Freedom for what?**

Jesus is no longer physically on earth but he has not left us alone. He has sent his Holy Spirit to be with us. When his Spirit comes to live within us, he gives us a new freedom.

### **a) Freedom to know God**

The things which we do wrong cause a barrier between us and God: 'your iniquities have separated you from your God' (Isaiah 59:2). When Jesus died on the cross he removed the barrier that existed between us and God. As a result he has made it possible for us to have a relationship with our Creator. We become his sons and daughters. The Spirit assures us of this relationship and he helps us to get to know God better. He helps us to pray and to understand God's word (the Bible).



## b) Freedom to love

'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). As we look at the cross we understand God's love for us. When the Spirit of God comes to live within us we experience that love.

As we do so we receive a new love for God and for other people. We are set free to live a life of love – a life centred around loving and serving Jesus and loving and serving other people rather than a life centred around ourselves.



## c) Freedom to change

People sometimes say, 'You are what you are. You can't change.' The good news is that with the help of the Spirit we can change. The Holy Spirit gives us the freedom to live the sort of lives that deep down we have always wanted to live. St Paul tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is 'love, joy, peace, patience,



kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23). When we ask the Spirit of God to come and live within us, these wonderful characteristics begin to grow in our lives.

## Why not?

So God offers us in Christ Jesus forgiveness, freedom and his Spirit to live within us. All this is a gift from God. When someone offers us a present we have a choice. We can either accept it, open it and enjoy it. Or else we can say, 'No thank you.' Sadly, many people make excuses for not accepting the gift which God offers.

Here are some of the excuses:

### a) 'I have no need of God'

When people say this they usually mean that they are quite happy without God. What they fail to realise is that our greatest need is not 'happiness' but 'forgiveness'. It takes a very proud person to say that they have no need of forgiveness.

We all need forgiveness. Without it we are in serious trouble. For God is not only our



loving Father; he is also a righteous judge.

Either we accept what Jesus has done for us on the cross, or else one day we will pay the just penalty ourselves for the things we have done wrong.

### **b) 'There is too much to give up'**

Sometimes, God puts his finger on something in our lives which we know is wrong and which we would have to give up if we want to enjoy this relationship with God through Jesus.



But we need to remember:

- God loves us. He asks us only to give up things which do us harm. If I saw some small children playing with a carving knife I would tell them to stop, not because I want to ruin their fun but because I do not want them to get hurt.
- What we give up is nothing compared to what we receive. The cost of not becoming a Christian is far greater than the cost of becoming a Christian.
- What we give up is nothing compared to what Jesus gave up when he died on the cross for us.

### **c) 'There must be a trap'**

Understandably, people often find it hard to accept that there is anything free in this life. They think it all sounds too easy and that there must be some hidden trap. However, what they fail to realise is that although it is free for us, it was not free for Jesus. He paid for it with his own blood. It is easy for us but it was not easy for him.



### **d) 'I'm not good enough'**

None of us is good enough. Nor can we ever make ourselves good enough for God. But that is why

Jesus came. He made it possible for God to accept us just as we are, whatever we have done and however much of a mess we have made of our lives.

### **e) 'I could never keep it up'**

We are right to think that we could never keep it up. We cannot by ourselves, but the Spirit of God, who comes to live within us, gives us the power and the strength to keep going as Christians.

### **f) 'I'll do it later'**

This is perhaps the most common excuse. Sometimes people say, 'I know it's true but I'm not ready.' They put it off. The longer we put it off the harder it becomes and the more we miss out. We never know whether or not we will get another opportunity. Speaking for myself, my only regret is that I did not accept the gift earlier.

## **What do we have to do?**

The New Testament makes it clear that we have to do something to accept the gift that God offers. This is an act of faith. John writes that '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' (John 3:16).

Believing involves an act of faith, based on all that we know about Jesus. It is not blind faith. It is

putting our trust in a Person. In some ways it is like the step of faith taken by a bride or a bridegroom when they say, 'I will' on their wedding day.

The way people take this step of faith varies enormously but I want to describe one way in which you can take this step of faith right now. It can be summarised by three very simple words:

### **a) 'Sorry'**

You have to ask God to forgive you for all the things you have done wrong and turn from everything which you know is wrong in your life. This is what the Bible means by 'repentance'.

### **b) 'Thank you'**

We believe that Jesus died for us on the cross. You need to thank him for dying for you and for the offer of his free gift of forgiveness, freedom and his Spirit.

### **c) 'Please'**

God never forces his way into our lives. You need to accept his gift and invite him to come and live within you by his Spirit.

If you would like to have a relationship with God and you are ready to say these three things, then here is a very simple prayer which you can pray and which will be the start of that relationship:

*Lord Jesus Christ,*

*I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience). Please forgive me. I now turn from everything which I know is wrong.*

*Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free.*

*Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift.*

*Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever.*

*Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

## **What now?**

### **1. Tell someone**

It is important to tell someone in order to underline the decision you have made. Often it is only when you tell someone else that it becomes a reality to you. It is probably best to start by telling someone who you think will be pleased to hear the news.



## **2. Read the Bible**

Once we have received Jesus and put our trust in him we become children of God. He is our heavenly Father. Like any father he wants us to have a close relationship with him. We develop this relationship as we listen to him (primarily through the Bible) and as we speak to him in prayer. The Bible is the word of God and you might find it helpful to begin by reading a few verses of John's Gospel every day. Ask God to speak to you as you read.

## **3. Start to speak to God each day (i.e. pray)**

I find the following a great help:

### **A - Adoration**

Praising God for who he is and what he has done.

### **C - Confession**

Asking God's forgiveness for anything that we have done wrong.

### **T - Thanksgiving**

Thanking God for health, family, friends and so on.

### **S - Supplication**

Praying for ourselves, for our friends and for others.



## 4. Join a lively church

It is important to be part of a group of Christians who get together to worship God, to hear what God is saying to them, to encourage one another and to make friends. Church should be an exciting place!



I first prayed a prayer like the one on page 23 on 16 February 1974. It changed my life. It is the best and most important thing I have ever done. I trust it will be the same for you.

## Further reading:

*Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel, which looks in greater detail at the relevance of Jesus to our lives today.

## Go Deeper

*The Bible in One Year* is a free daily Bible reading resource with commentary by Nicky and Pippa Gumbel. Each day a passage from the Old Testament, a Psalm or Proverb, and a passage from the New Testament are covered so in the course of one year, the whole Bible is read.

Intended to be read or listened to alongside the Bible to provide fresh understanding of the texts, it is available for free via the Bible in One Year app on iOS or Android.

The following pages are selected excerpts from *The Bible in One Year* around the theme of Easter.



[bibleinoneyear.org](http://bibleinoneyear.org)

## EXCERPT FROM THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: DAY 69

### Crucified

In the days of slavery in the United States, southern slaves were living under brutal conditions. They composed some deeply moving songs with haunting melodies, rich with emotion. These 'spirituals' were songs of hope and anticipation. They were the soul-cry of the slave longing for freedom.

They embraced Jesus as their Saviour and *Lord* and, in the midst of almost unbearable suffering, they experienced his grace, peace and hope for the future. From this relationship they were able to sing:

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

In the New Testament passage for today, we see the background to the extraordinary claim of the New Testament that the one '*they crucified*' is in fact *my Lord*. God is described in the Old Testament as '*The Lord*'.

The original Hebrew word for 'Lord' (YHWH) had no vowels and was not vocalised. It was considered too sacred to pronounce. For that reason, when vowels were added to the original Hebrew texts they weren't added to 'the name' (YHWH). There has been much debate in modern times as to what vowels should be used – it used

to be thought it should be 'Jehovah', but most scholars now think 'Yahweh' is more accurate.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, this sacred name (YHWH) is translated *Kyrios* (Lord). It really is quite extraordinary, therefore, that the New Testament writers (who were Jewish monotheists) made this fundamental Christian affirmation that '*Jesus is Lord*' (*Kyrios*) (Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Acts 2:36) and that *our Lord* has been *crucified for us*.

#### READING FROM PSALMS

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### **Psalm 31:19–24** **Love the Lord**

David urges, '*Love the Lord*, all his faithful people!' (v.23a). To love the Lord is the first commandment. This is a two-way relationship of love. We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Our love is a response to his love.

David writes, 'Praise be to *the Lord*, for he showed his wonderful love to me' (Psalm 31:21a). Meditate on *how much God loves you*. 'What a *stack of blessing* you have piled up for those who worship you' (v.19, MSG).

He hides you in the 'shelter of (his) presence' (v.20a), *he keeps you safe* in his dwelling (v.20b). He *protects you* from 'accusing tongues' (v.20b). He *hears your 'cry for* when you call 'for help' (v.22b). 'God takes care of all who stay close to him' (v.23, MSG). Therefore, you can 'be strong and

take heart' (v.24a), even when things seem difficult.  
'Be brave. Be strong. Don't give up' (v.24, MSG).

## **Prayer**

Lord, I praise you for the wonders of your love.  
Thank you that you hear my cry for mercy when  
I call to you for help. Lord, help...

## NEW TESTAMENT READING

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### **Mark 15:1–32**

#### **Jesus is Lord**

'Were you there when they crucified *my Lord*?'  
I find it heart-rending to read the account of  
the abuse, torture and crucifixion of Jesus. They  
crucified my. Jesus is:

#### **1. My King**

Jesus accepts the title of 'king of the Jews' (Mark  
15:2). The soldiers use it as a term of abuse (v.18)  
and it is the name written on the cross as the  
charge against him (v.26). However, Jesus is the  
fulfilment of the great longing of Israel and the  
many promises of a Davidic king (see Isaiah  
Chapters 9 and 11). He is a king with a difference.

He is handed over to Pilate out of envy ('Sheer  
spite', Mark 15:10, MSG) by the religious leaders. Be  
careful of envy. It is sometimes described as the  
'religious sin'.

Jesus is subject to insults and false accusation.

If you are slandered or bad-mouthed be thankful that God allows you, in a tiny way, to enter into the sufferings of Jesus and pray that God will help you to respond as he did – with love and forgiveness.

## **2. My Messiah**

It is ironic that the religious leaders mocked him and described him as 'this Christ' (vv.31–32), because that is exactly what he was and is. The English term 'Christ' is derived from the Greek *Christos*, which translates the Hebrew *Mashiah* or *Messiah*. Both the Greek and the Hebrew literally mean 'anointed'. We have seen Jesus as the anointed High Priest of God. Here we see him as the anointed King.

## **3. My Saviour**

Again we see the extraordinary irony of the mocking words of both the passers-by, 'Come down from the cross and save yourself!' (v.30), and the religious leaders, '*He saved others... but he can't save himself!*' (v.31). This was exactly true – in order to be the Saviour of the world he could not save himself. He had to go through the agony of the crucifixion in order to save you and me.

The incident with Barabbas provides us with a picture of what Jesus has done as Saviour of the world. Barabbas, like me, was guilty and deserved punishment. He was 'in prison with the rebels who had committed murder in the uprising' (v.7). Jesus, on the other hand, was totally innocent. As Pilate

remarked, 'What crime has he committed?' (v.14). Yet Barabbas was 'released' and set free, whilst Jesus was 'handed... over to be crucified' (v.15). The innocent one faced the punishment of death so that I, the guilty one, could go free. We may not be murderers like Barabbas, but all of us need rescuing by the Saviour of the world.

#### **4. My Lord**

In yesterday's passage we saw how when Jesus was asked by the High Priest, 'are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed one?' he answered, 'I am' (14:61-62). The high priest's response was to accuse Jesus of blasphemy - that is claiming to be God. Why was this? When God revealed his name YHWH to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15), he also explained its meaning. It comes from the Hebrew phrase '*I am who I am*' or simply 'I am'. The high priest's response to Jesus' statement suggests that Jesus was declaring himself to be none other than YHWH (the Lord).

This amazing truth is the background behind St Paul's extraordinary soul-cry in Philippians 2:5-11 (which forms the basis of the prayer below).

#### **Prayer**

Lord, help me to have the same attitude as Jesus, who humbled himself and became obedient to death. Thank you that you exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is

above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that *Jesus Christ is Lord*.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

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**Leviticus 21:1–22:33**  
**Worship the Lord**

There is a great emphasis in this passage on the 'holy name' (22:2) of God. In chapter 22 God says to his people '*I am the Lord*' nine times (vv.2–3,8–9,16,30–33). Why does God emphasise his name in these verses?

Names were very significant in the ancient times. They were believed to tell you something important about the person in question. As we have seen, God's name was no exception. The name YHWH declared the uniqueness and greatness of God.

God's name also reminded the people of his unique relationship with them. It was a name that had been revealed to Moses as a sign of God's promise to be with his people (Exodus 3).

Each time God declares '*I am the Lord*' it reminds us both of his greatness and of our relationship with him. Each of the laws in the chapter is built upon these truths and is designed to point towards them.

The theme of Leviticus 21 is God's holiness and the need for the priesthood in order for the people



to be able to approach God. In the New Testament we see that *Jesus is* the Great High Priest and it is through him that we approach God. Jesus is:

## **1. Completely holy**

The high priest had to be *ceremonially clean* (21:11b). Jesus was morally perfect. Jesus is 'completely holy, uncompromised by sin' (Hebrews 7:26, MSG).

## **2. Dedicated to God**

The High Priest had to be *dedicated to God* (Leviticus 21:12), as Jesus was (Luke 2:22).

## **3. The anointed one**

The High Priest had to be *anointed* with oil (Leviticus 21:12) as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. He is the anointed one: the Christ.

If we are reminded of the need for a perfect priest in chapter 21, we are also reminded of the need for a perfect sacrifice in chapter 22. The sacrifice has to be 'without defect' (22:19,21). Jesus was both the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice.

Take these three passages together and meditate on the extraordinary soul-cry: 'Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2:11) and on his wonderful love for us demonstrated by his crucifixion on our behalf,

and our appropriate response to 'Love the Lord' (Psalm 31:23a).

## **Prayer**

Lord, I want to worship you. It is you who makes me holy. It is you who rescues me from captivity. You are the Lord. I love you Lord.

## **Pippa Adds Psalm 31:24**

'Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.'

I need lots of strength today. Actually, most days! More strength please, Lord.

## **EXCERPT FROM THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: DAY 152**

### **Wow**

Judah Smith is a delightful, young Pentecostal pastor from Seattle, Washington. He is one of the best communicators that I have ever heard – especially to young people. When listening to others, his favourite expression is 'Wow!' For him it is an expression of respect, awe and reverence.

There are many blessings to living in Western Europe in the twenty-first century. However, we live in a society in which respect, awe and reverence do not seem to be as valued as they once were.

## **Proverbs 13:20–14:4**

### **Respect**

A culture of respect underlies the book of Proverbs. We see three examples in this passage:

#### **1. Respect for the Lord**

'An honest life shows *respect* for God' (14:2, MSG). The word 'fear' (NIV) is probably best understood as 'respect'. Respect for the Lord is the starting point for respect in all our other relationships.

#### **2. Respect for the wise**

Choose carefully whom you spend time with. 'Whoever walks with the wise grows wise' (13:20). 'Wise speech evokes nothing but *respect*' (14:3, MSG). Our society increasingly devalues the wisdom that comes with age. Wisdom often (though not always) comes through the experience of a long life. There is a huge amount of untapped wisdom in older people.

#### **3. Respect in the home**

'A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them' (13:24, MSG). This teaching has sometimes been abused by an over-literal interpretation. What the book of Proverbs is encouraging is a culture of respect in the family – respect for parents and also respect for children, which involves loving discipline.

## Prayer

Lord, help us to gain wisdom and to model good family life, combining love and respect.

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

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## John 20:10–31

### Awe

Jesus really was raised from the dead. The tomb really was empty on Easter morning. Jesus' followers really did meet him alive again. The resurrection did happen. The best historical explanation for the origin of Christianity is that it really is true. Jesus is alive today!

John records four resurrection appearances of Jesus – the first three of which are in this passage. In these appearances, we see not only some of the evidence but also some of the results of the resurrection.

#### 1. Awe and amazement

There is something indefinably first-hand about the account of Jesus's appearance to Mary. There is nothing quite like it in all ancient literature.

In the culture of the day, a woman's testimony would not have been considered as weighty as that of a man. If the disciples had been making this up, they would not have devised the first appearance as being to Mary Magdalene.

Jesus does not make a triumphant appearance to signify his victory. He appears to Mary – the

loved one, the forgiven one – alone in a garden, with gentle love.

This shows a huge amount about Jesus' respect for women. By this act, and others during his life on earth, he laid the foundation for a revolution in the world's attitude to women. Sadly, it has taken 2,000 years and we are still not there yet.

Jesus does not ask Mary what she is looking for. He asks, 'Who is it you are you looking for?' (v.15).

Mary's response is one of awe and amazement. As she realised it was Jesus, she cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher)' (v.16).

He explains to her that she must not try to hold on to him (v.17). She must begin a new, more internal relationship with the risen Jesus, he in her and she in him (which will be fulfilled with the gift of the Spirit).

It is not enough to know the evidence of the facts of the resurrection. We need a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

## **2. Joy and peace**

The world is desperately searching for happiness and peace of mind. The supreme source of joy and peace is a relationship with Jesus.

Mary rushed off to tell the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!' (v.18). Jesus' appearance to the disciples brought them overwhelming joy (v.20). Three times he says to them, 'Peace be with you!' (vv.19,21,26) – the inner peace that flows from his presence.

Faith in Jesus brings joy and peace to all who

believe. Jesus said to Thomas, 'Blessed and happy and to be envied are those who have never seen me and yet have believed' (v.29, AMP).

In this short encounter, Jesus transformed the group of frightened, confused individuals into a community of love, joy and peace.

### **3. Purpose and power**

Jesus gives them a new sense of purpose: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (v.21). The resurrection is the message of hope for the world. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. There is life beyond the grave. This gives your life on earth a whole new meaning and purpose. You are sent out by Jesus to proclaim this message to the world.

Finally, he also gave them power. He 'breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"' (vv.22-23). The Holy Spirit provides the strength and authority to forgive.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. He gives you the power of his Holy Spirit and the power of his word to declare the message of God's forgiveness to human beings. This is the message that brings eternal life.

### **4. Respect and reverence**

Thomas was a cynic; sceptical and full of doubt. I think I would probably have had the same response as him when he said, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the

nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it' (v.25).

He must have felt so humbled when Jesus appeared to him and said, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe' (v.27).

The wounds of Jesus are there for all time to reveal the humble and forgiving love of Jesus. Jesus accepts Thomas just as he is. He accepts his challenge without complaint or criticism.

Do not feel guilty about having doubts. Like Thomas, be honest about your doubts and bring them to Jesus. When Jesus answered his doubts, Thomas' response was the pinnacle of respect, reverence and awe. He said, 'My Lord and my God!' (v.28). From a place of having doubted, Thomas makes perhaps the strongest statement of Jesus' divinity in all of the Gospels. He is the first person to look at Jesus and call him 'God'. He said, in effect, 'Wow!'

Jesus went on to tell him that belief leads to blessing (v.29). In fact, it leads to life. Belief and life go hand in hand in John's Gospel (v.31), because, if you believe in Jesus you have life. This is real life of high quality, an abundant life (10:10) that goes on for ever (3:16).

John's whole reason for writing his Gospel was so that 'you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (20:31). The resurrection is the basis of our hope for life before death, as well as beyond it.

## Prayer

Jesus, my Lord and my God, today I worship you with awe and reverence.

## OLD TESTAMENT READING

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### **2 Samuel 1:1–2:7**

#### **Reverence:**

David's attitude to Saul is a wonderful example of how to respond to those who try to do you harm. David did not seek revenge. He was not bitter. He treated Saul with the utmost respect. After all, God had used Saul greatly in the past. The fact that Saul had gone off the rails did not erase David's respect.

His attitude to Saul was quite extraordinary. He said to the Amalekite who claimed to have finished off Saul, 'Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?' (1:14). The Amalekite may well have been trying to benefit from what would have been a perversion of the facts. He may have been a human vulture, who took the royal insignia from Saul to gain favour with David. In any event, it did him no good because of David's reverence for Saul.

David grieved over the death of his great friend Jonathan and over Saul (vv.19–27). Grief is a natural, necessary and healthy response to the death of those we love.

Supremely, David revered God. He 'enquired of the Lord' (2:1). He asked, 'Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?' The Lord answered, 'Go



up.' He then asked, 'Where shall I go?' The Lord answered, 'To Hebron.' David obeyed and was anointed king over the house of Judah.

## **Prayer**

Lord, help me to love and respect all those you have anointed in leadership roles, whether they support us or whether they don't. Help me to live a life of reverence, respect and awe.

## **Pippa Adds** **John 20:10**

I am so interested that, of all the people he could have appeared to, Jesus chose to appear first to Mary Magdalene. He did not go to his senior disciple (or even his mother!), but rather to a woman whom no one in the world rated as important.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Mere Christianity by CS Lewis © CS Lewis Pte Ltd 1942, 1943, 1944, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Other Helpful Resources by Nicky Gumbel

*Questions of Life* goes into greater detail concerning the relevance of Jesus to our lives today and offers an exploration into the basics of the Christian faith.

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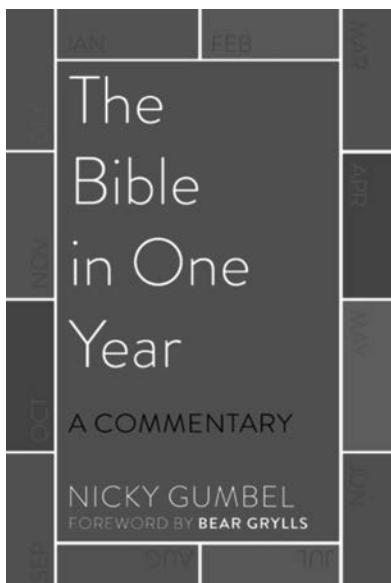


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**Nicky Gumbel** is the pioneer of Alpha. He studied law at Cambridge and theology at Oxford, practiced as a lawyer and is now Vicar of HTB in London.

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