

Who Jesus really is.

No. 4 **Jesus the man who lives as God.** Bible reading John 20:1-18.

All through his gospel John is seeking to prove that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”, so that his readers and listeners will believe and become spiritually alive, John 20:31.

John clearly believes in life after death. He believes that this life can be sampled *before* death too! Participation in this life is available through Jesus Christ the Saviour and Lord. Participation will take a person through physical death and on into the next part of life's journey. It is like an airplane passenger, staying in the same seat, while gliding majestically up through the grey stratocumulus clouds before bursting into clear blue sunshine filled heavens.

This life beyond life is the Christian hope. Life that is more than the one you were born with. Not just life here on earth. Life firing on all cylinders like a smooth running engine, with no misfiring at all. Life as God the Creator intends it to be. This life is the life of Jesus, which Christians share.

Consider what John has written for us:

- “In (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of men”, John 1:4.
Good light brings wonderful colour to our experiences in the world.
- “Yet, to all who received him, to those who believed in (Jesus’) name, he gave the right to become children of God”, John 1:12.

Children are at the beginning of new lives!

- God's children are "born of God", John 1:13.
There is a life added on to this life. An extra life even in this life. Life – as it were – extended upwards into the second floor.
- Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but *the Spirit* gives birth to spirit", John 3:6. The capital 'S' in most Bible translations shows this is the work of God the Holy Spirit in a human life.
- "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*", John 3:16.
Life never ending. Being forever alive. Continuous non-deadness, in a real sense. Christians living even through their own death! One day I will live on: experiencing my own death, and discovering more beyond it.
- Jesus said, (I paraphrase) "I can give you living water", John 4:10.
Anyone who recognises who Jesus is and who asks for this living water will be given it.
- Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work", John 4:34. We all eat and drink in order to physically live.
This extra life we are now looking at has "living water" as it's source and the food of obedience to God's will as it's strength.
- Jesus said, "The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it", John 5:21. He continued, "Whoever hears my word and believes on him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned. He (or she) has crossed from death to life", John 5:24. Chocolate Easter eggs are bought, and given, but they can only be eaten after being received!

Christian believers have received Jesus. His life is God's gift. Jesus' life makes an eternal difference to the recipient's destination as this present existence ends. Everyone does *not* automatically go to heaven, nor "Rest in Peace", no matter how often the TV news shows bunches of flowers left at tragedy sites alongside cards with such wishes on!

- Jesus said, "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world", John 6:33. He added, "I am the bread of life", John 6:35. Thinking about Jesus is our staple diet of spiritual food. Thinking of Jesus is life-giving. True thinking of Jesus is life-sustaining.
- Jesus said, "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one (human/Christian) who feeds on me will live because of me", John 6:57. Jesus is full of spiritual nutrients and vitamins, bringing healthy spiritual life to the Christian who meditates on Jesus' person and work. Jesus is a spiritual health food! In the shops of England I can choose from a variety of foods for a healthy life. But in regards to spiritual life there is only one option. It is found in Jesus! And only in Jesus!
- Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life", John 6:63. The expressions of Jesus are life-giving even in a desert climate.
- Jesus said, "... I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord ...", John 10:17-18. Jesus never once surrendered to sin in his entire life on earth. But he did surrender his life *for* sin, once and for all.

- Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He (or she) who believes in me will live, though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”, John 11:25-26. This life we are considering is the person of Jesus. Just as Jesus’ life came safely through death, so everyone who shares his life will pass safely through death too!
- Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”, John 12:23. The word “glorified” is John’s code word for the sufferings and death of Jesus from Nazareth. Verse 24 tells us that *THE life is going to die!* But death is not the end. Jesus’ death will produce much more life, just as a seed gives up itself to produce a plant with many more life-giving seeds. Verse 25 teaches that people who follow Jesus with this perspective are already living an eternal life. Human life is completed (glorified) by dying properly. Dying properly means following Jesus through physical death to undying life in the Spirit beyond.
- Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” John 14:6.
- Jesus said, “I am the true vine”, John 15:1. My paraphrase of verse 5 is Jesus continuing, “Remain true to me and you will have a fruitful life”. Every spring season in England beautiful flowers emerge from the ground, or from plants that look almost dead. The Creator’s life is in them. There is no secret to successful Christian living except Jesus! And Jesus is no secret! Life can be seen in the right season because it simply breaks out of its cover.
- Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that (people) may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”, John 17:3.

And remember why John wrote all these things. “John wrote his gospel account 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*”.

Jesus is the Christian hope! His resurrection is the cause of our rejoicing. Because Jesus lives on *after* his death I can really live *before* mine! Real life is available to all people who will welcome Jesus into every part of their lives.

So, who is this life-giving Lord Jesus?

On Good Friday we remember Jesus is God – the God who died as a man.

On Easter day we remember Jesus is man – the man who lives as God.

I suggest **four points to remember about Jesus as the man who lives as God**, from John 20:1-18.

1. Jesus the man who was buried, John 19:41-42. Mary went to his burial place, verse 1. So did Peter and John, verse 4. They had seen him die. They had watched from a distance. They noted where his body was put. They went out to that very spot.

Jesus the man, whose body Nicodemus had brought in from Calvary.

(Nicodemus seems to have been born again sometime between John 3:1-21 and 19:39-40.

The dying Jesus who bled blood and water, as John himself had seen, John 19:34-35.

Jesus the man who was bloodied and beaten before being crucified, John 19:1.

This man Jesus was buried.

Jesus the man who Philip and the rest of the disciples had difficulty believing was anyone more than a mere man, John 14:8-9.

Jesus the man whose own step-brothers did not see as anyone other than “their older brother”, John 7:5.

In John 20:1-18 *this man Jesus* was recognised as living on after his death. He was recognised when he pronounced the name “Mary” (Greek: Mariam), John 20:16. The man she took to be the gardener in the graveyard, but who was really God-in-the-risen-flesh! Jesus lived beyond his physical death. God was living as a man so that he could die, then live again.

2. Jesus the man going back to his Father, John 20:17. Jesus said to Mary, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”. The word “return” means “to go back to”. Later on Jesus ascended to his Father in heaven, Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-10. Here, it is as if he is saying, “I am not yet in the ascended state. I have not yet ascended and remained in the ascended state”.¹

¹ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Leicester: IVP) 1994, p.593-594.

“This verse belongs to a handful of the most difficult passages in the New Testament”.² It *probably* means: “Stop touching me for I am not yet in the ascended state. You don’t have to hang on to me as if I am to permanently disappear. This is a time for joy and for sharing the good news I am alive and in the process of ascending to my Father”.³

Three and a half years before his crucifixion Jesus was continually with his disciples. After his resurrection he was not continuously with them. His spiritual body was no longer constrained as it had been during his earthly life. His spiritual body was already transformed into its heavenly reality. Eternity took time to complete what was happening. Jesus wanted to help people believe.

Later in John 20:27 Jesus invited Thomas to check that he is the same man, Jesus, by seeing and touching the wounds from the crucifixion process on his body. Thomas was convinced immediately. He spoke in awe and wonder, “My Lord and my God”, John 20:28.

Several times John has reminded us that Jesus came from the Father. Now John writes that *Jesus is going back where he came from*.

- “The Word became flesh and (lived) among us... the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”, John 1:14.
- “He who does not honour the Son, does not honour the Father who sent him”, John 5:23.

² D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.641-642.

³ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.644.

- “And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me ...”, John 5:36-37.
- “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him ...”, John 6:44.
- “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own”, John 7:16-17.
- “But (Jesus) continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world”, John 8:23. “... he who sent me is reliable”, John 8:26.
- “I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, ...” John 8:38.
- “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here”, John 8:42.
- (I am the) “one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world”, John 10:36.

His claims to have come from the Father resulted in Jesus being in court.

Legalistic religion challenged the loving God over blasphemy. “This man claims to be the Son of God”, (see John 10:33). Jesus was *so much a man* his accusers did not recognise him as anything else. Jesus simply said who he was. He was killed for speaking the truth. The truth was that Jesus was (and is) God.

“I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”, John 20:17.

3. Jesus the man who has brothers and sisters. The man Jesus has blood relatives, but not human blood from the same human father and mother. Jesus had no human father. He was not orphaned. His parents were not divorced. Jesus *never at any time had had* a human father.

The blood that soaked into Calvary's earth at the place where his cross sank into the ground bought Jesus his family! Blood relatives in a completely new way. Some women and some men. Some old and some young. Some people from every tribe, culture, race, and colour under the sun are altogether in Jesus' family.

John 20:17, "Tell my brothers" Jesus said to Mary. Not his human brothers – fellow children of Mary – but his disciples, (compare Mark 3:31-35). His born-again family are those who chose to follow him in life and in death.

Later, these disciples would see him, John 20:19. In a locked room on the first evening after his resurrection, the third after his execution. Jesus appeared to join them. Seven days later they saw him again in the same way and the same place, John 20:26-27. The disciples had breakfast with the risen Jesus on a Galilee beach, John 21:1-14. But to begin with these disciples only had the testimony of another to lead them towards their personal beliefs.

Jesus, the man they lived with for some three and a half years; Jesus the man who was buried; Jesus who was going back to his Father – God in heaven; *this Jesus was calling them his brothers!* He was no mere man. He had

conquered death. The grave could not keep him under. He had eternal life. And reader, if you are “born again” (John 3:3-5), if you are “born of God”, (John 1:13), you are Jesus’ brother or sister too! If you have “received him”, (John 1:12), you share eternal life with him, (1 John 5:11-12).

4. **Jesus the man to believe in.** John tells us that Mary believed. She said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”, John 20:18. John tells us that the disciples believed. “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord”, John 20:20.

Jesus’ first followers

- knew the facts
- they found faith
- and therefore they had a firm future, on a Holy Spirit inspired commission, “Peace be with you! (Arabic: Salaam alekum!) As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”, John 20:21.

John even tells us that doubting Thomas eventually believed, John 20:24-29. Thomas was blessed when he saw the nail prints in Jesus’ body, but he was not as blessed as he could have been had he simply believed the testimony of the others.

And so John asks the question of us, his readers, centuries later. What about you? It requires a basic and uncomplicated answer. If you believe you have 100% complete life. If you do not believe you remain dead before God in your sin. You remain a dead loss, with a dead end. A dead duck who is dead beat!

And if you choose to remain so dead, you will *never* know what it is to really live, either before or after your own earthly death.

In his later letters John wrote this. “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us”, 1 John 1:2.

This man Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”, 1 John 2:2.

Jesus has taken the judicial wrath of God against sin, on to himself. He now clothes those of us exposed by sin and its consequences with a made-to-measure outfit of his own righteousness. It brilliantly suits us! Our sin is imputed to God the Son Jesus Christ, and his right standing with his Father, God the Father, is imputed to us. God saves us and God sanctifies us. Jesus our Saviour is the man God himself became in order to do precisely that.

Now Jesus remains the God-man in heaven. God the Son’s divine nature is permanently united with his human nature. Jesus lives forever, not just as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity (as before his Incarnation), but also as Jesus – the man born of Mary, the carpenter Messiah, having crafted the salvation of his people under his Father in heaven’s watchful eye!

- The man Jesus fully met God’s requirements to solve the problem of human sin.
- And the man Jesus fully meets man’s need of a Saviour!

Jesus, the man who now lives again, as the God he has always been!

I urge you to believe now and to have life in his name from this day onwards.

by Colin Salter.

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Part of a series: "Who Jesus really is".