

Being theologians for a day

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY ASKS, 'IF THIS IS WHAT JESUS IS LIKE, WHAT IS GOD LIKE?'

These seven passages are from the Gospels in the New Testament, which tell the stories of Jesus' life. Theologians say that Jesus is God, and so they argue that if you look at Jesus, you see what God is like. So, for a Christian, from these stories about Jesus, what might a theologian say God is like?

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' TEACHING

One of the first times Jesus taught in public was in a synagogue in Nazareth:

Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read,

"The Lord's Spirit
has come to me,
because he has chosen me
to tell the good news
to the poor.
The Lord has sent me
to announce freedom
for prisoners,
to give sight to the blind,
to free everyone
who suffers,
and to say, 'This is the year
the Lord has chosen.'"

Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, "What you have just heard me read has come true today."

Luke 4:16–21 (CEV)

JESUS AND THE PARALYSED MAN

One day when Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and experts in Moses' Teachings were present. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. Jesus had the power of the Lord to heal.

Some men brought a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They tried to take him into the house and put him in front of Jesus. But they could not find a way to get him into the house because of the crowd. So they went up on the roof. They made an

opening in the tiles and let the man down on his stretcher among the people. (They lowered him in front of Jesus.)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Sir, your sins are forgiven." The experts in Moses' Teachings and the Pharisees thought, "Who is this man? He's dishonouring God! Who besides God can forgive sins?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he said to them, "What are you thinking? Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Then he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

The man immediately stood up in front of them and picked up the stretcher he had been lying on. Praising God, he went home.

Everyone was amazed and praised God. They were filled with awe and said, "We've seen things today we can hardly believe!"

Luke 5:17–39 (God's Word)

JESUS ADDRESSES HIS AUDIENCES

Jesus tells three stories back to back – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. Note who he is telling the stories to, and what they are up to:

By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story.

"Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbours, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' Count on it – there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue."

Luke 15:1–7 (The Message)

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JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

John's Gospel includes a long section where Jesus teaches his disciples. It is set in the hours before he is arrested and executed:

"As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other."

John 15:9–17 (CEB)

JESUS WELCOMES CHILDREN

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: "Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these." After laying hands on them, he left.

Matthew 19:13–15 (The Message)

JESUS IS EXECUTED ON THE CROSS

When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

Luke 23:33–34 (CEB)

THE RESURRECTED JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES

Jesus died on Friday. On the Sunday morning, they find the tomb empty, and Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. Then he appears to the rest of the disciples:

It was still the first day of the week [i.e. Sunday]. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

John 20:19–23 (CEB)

1. **Imagine what an eyewitness would tell their friends and family when they returned home after this event. How would they describe what Jesus is like? Write down your ideas, explaining what you think is important to Jesus from these texts.**
2. **If Jesus really was teaching for three years, why have these events been chosen to be recorded and remembered? Give some reasons.**
3. **Have a look at Resource 6.7, which contains background information for your chosen texts. You need to look for reasons why these stories were included in the Gospels, out of all the things Jesus said and did.**

