

SOUL OUTLINE OF TALK ONE: CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To welcome people to the course.
- To make the point that many people have the wrong impression of Christianity.
- To explain that Christianity is not about rules or ceremonies. It's all about Jesus Christ.
- To explain that we can only find true significance and real meaning in our lives once we realize that there's a God who created us and who wants us to know him.
- To explain that we can only get to know God through Jesus, and that we're going to find out about him during Soul.

Introductory illustration

Tell the group a funny/interesting example of what you used to think about Christianity. Use a personal example if you can, but if you don't have one (perhaps because you have been a Christian from a young age), interview another leader or talk about someone you know. Keep the illustration short. Alternatively, show a short clip from a film (eg: *Mr Bean in church*) or cartoon (eg: *The Simpsons in church*) – check that you can do this legally.

Opening

- Loads of people have different ideas about Christianity. It often depends on whether they know any Christians, or have had experience of being in a church.
- Your poster lists some of those ideas.

Talk about some of the pictures drawn on the poster. Be careful not to make any negative comments – the aim is just to discover the range of ideas your group members currently have. There will be opportunity later in the course to discuss some of these views, so do keep the poster, or make a note of what was drawn, so that you can be sure to address these issues at some point.

1. What is Christianity about?

- Many people think that Christianity is about religious ceremonies, or keeping a set of rules. Mark says something very different from that. As we saw in the very first sentence of Mark's book, Christianity is all about a person, Jesus Christ.

Explain that the Bibles you're using have extra bits added to help you find the section you want. These extras include the chapter and verse numbers, and also the headings. So Mark didn't write the heading above verse 1 – the publishers added it.

- Mark's own heading is really verse 1, where he tells us exactly what his book is about.

Read **Mark 1:1** aloud.

- Mark's entire book is about:
 - a man called **Jesus**
 - whose title is the "**Christ**" (which means "God's chosen King")
 - who is the **Son of God**.
- The rest of Mark's book shows us what these things mean, and why he believes they are true. So as we do *Soul* together, we will be looking at Jesus Christ and finding out what Mark tells us about him.
- We'll also be thinking about some of the big questions people ask about life – questions like "Where did life come from?" and "What's the purpose of life?"

2. Where did life come from?

You may want to include a funny illustration here – maybe display a cartoon picture about where life came from. Alternatively, show or read out the following: "one bucket of water, eight bars of soap, one nail and the head of a matchstick". Ask your group if they know what this makes? (Answer: these sum up the chemical contents of a human body!)

- Scientists spend billions every year trying to work out exactly how the earth began and where life came from. You've probably learned about some of their ideas in school or from books and television programmes.
- There are two possible answers to this question. Either we are here by chance, or someone made us.
- If we are here by chance, it means we have no real significance or value. We're just a bunch of chemicals who wander around the earth meeting other bunches of chemicals. We have no value; we don't matter; because we're just a splodge of atoms in a body!
- If we have been made by someone, if we have been created, that makes a huge difference. The Bible says that God created us, that we are his workmanship. This means that we matter enormously. God says so.
- We don't matter because of having the best gadgets or wearing the latest fashion. We don't matter because of where we come from or what we're good at. Instead,

we matter – and matter enormously – because God created us. He made us, he loves us, and he has a purpose for our lives. Our lives mean something.

3. What's the point of life?

- Where life comes from makes a huge difference when we start thinking about death. Most people don't like talking about death, even though every one of us will face death sooner or later. But since we all have to die, what's the point of living?
- Lots of people have tried to work out what the point of life is. If we had drawn a poster about that, I'm sure we would have come up with loads of different ideas. TV, magazines and the internet often give the impression that the answer is to be rich, famous and good looking. But they're also quick to tell us stories of celebrities who haven't found happiness as a result.

Include an illustration here of someone who has been in the news recently because their success has left them depressed, suicidal or turning to drugs or alcohol.

- You would think that fame and money would lead to happiness, but plenty of celebrities find that it doesn't. So they turn to drugs, drinking or even suicide. Why?
- Well, the Bible says that we don't really start living until we know the one who made us, and live as he made us to live. So the question is, how can we know God?

4. Getting to know God

Choose a popular celebrity for this illustration. What would you do if you really wanted to get to know _____? (Fill in the name of a suitable celebrity for your group.)

Maybe you could go to where they live and call out their name as they leave the house. Or you could try to find their phone number, email or Twitter address. But they probably wouldn't reply. The only way you're going to be able to get to know _____ is if they want to know you. It would have to be him/her who contacted you and arranged to meet up.

- The same is true if we want to know the one who made us. People have tried knowing God by thinking deeply about him, or using their imagination to find out what he's like, but we can't get to know God that way. We can't get to know God by ourselves at all.
- We need God to reveal himself to us. Mark says that God has done that by sending Jesus Christ. That's why Mark's book is all about Jesus. If we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus.

Conclusion

- There's a word in Mark's first sentence that tells us why looking at Jesus is such a good idea. The word is "gospel", and it means "good news". The news about

Jesus isn't bad or boring – it's good news.

- During *Soul* we're going to explore what Mark tells us about who Jesus is, and about why he came. We're also going to think about what it means to live as a Christian – what it means to follow Jesus.
- So is this course worth sticking with for seven weeks? The reason I think you'll find it's worth doing is because Jesus is the only way we can know the one who made us and understand the point of life. Jesus answers those big questions we've been thinking about: "Where did life come from?" and "What's the point of living?"
- That's why "the gospel about Jesus Christ" is good news.



OUTLINE OF TALK TWO: IDENTITY

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To show that Jesus is God by exploring some events in his life.
- To show that Jesus can forgive sins, has power to heal, has power over nature, has power over demons and has power over death.

Note: Keep the pace up as you give this talk – it's a whistle-stop tour, not a full unpacking of every passage!

Introductory illustration

Choose a person from history who would interest your group, eg: Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Martin Luther King, Leonardo da Vinci, Henry VIII, Shakespeare. Ask your group how they would go about finding out about this person. Explain that you are going to find out about Jesus by looking at some of the things he did and said.

Opening

- Last time, we saw that Christianity is all about Jesus. Mark tells us that Jesus is the "Christ", which means the chosen one of God, God's promised King. Mark also says that Jesus is "the Son of God".
- Those are pretty amazing claims, so Mark gives us loads of evidence to back them up. He tells us about some of the fantastic things Jesus did and said. We're going to find out about a few of them now, and see what each one shows us about who Jesus is.

Visual aid: Use a visual aid to help the members of your group see how Mark builds up evidence for who Jesus is. This could be written on a white board or large sheet of paper, or displayed using powerpoint. Write or display the heading: "Who is Jesus?" An alternative way to display this information would be to write the headings ("Who is Jesus?" etc) onto slips of paper and then stick them onto the poster from last week's session.

1. Who is Jesus? Someone who can forgive sins

- We've already looked at this passage in our groups, but let's read it again together:

Read aloud **Mark 2:1-12**.

Note: You know your group. If you think they'll remember this passage well from earlier, then you may prefer to shorten the talk by not reading it again.

- When Jesus tells the paralysed man that his sins are forgiven, he is really saying two astonishing things:
 1. That he has the authority and ability to forgive sins.
 2. That he is God.
- The religious leaders understood that this is what Jesus was saying – that's why they were so furious with him.

Act out the following illustration:

Imagine that I go up to _____ (a leader in the room) and punch him/her in the stomach. But then I turn to _____ (a different leader or a group member) and ask him/her to forgive me. That doesn't work, does it? The only way I can be forgiven for hitting _____ (the first leader) is if he/she forgives me.

- The same is true for our sins. God is the one we sin against. He is the one we hurt. So only God can forgive us.
- The teachers of the law were right when they asked: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" This means when Jesus says **he** can forgive sins, he's saying that he is God.

Visual aid: Underneath the heading "Who is Jesus?" add "Someone who can forgive sins".

2. Who is Jesus? Someone who has power to heal

- Imagine again that you're in the room with Jesus. You've seen the roof being torn apart; you've watched a man lowered through the hole and onto the floor; and you've heard Jesus tell the man that his sins are forgiven. Would you believe what Jesus said?
- It would be hard to believe, because nothing seemed to have changed. The man was still lying at Jesus' feet, unable to walk. The religious leaders certainly didn't believe it. They were sure Jesus was just pretending to be able to do what God can do – that's why they were so angry.
- Jesus knew all of that – and so he did something else as well, to show everyone he really does have the same power and authority as God.

Read aloud **Mark 2:11-12**.

- This man had needed four friends to carry him to Jesus. But now he was completely well and strong. He was able to stand up, roll his mat up, tuck it under his arm and walk out of the house without anyone helping him.

- No wonder everyone was amazed! They saw that Jesus had the same power to heal that God has. And as Jesus himself pointed out, this proved he had the power to forgive sins, too.

Visual aid: Add “Someone who has power to heal” to your visual aid.

3. Who is Jesus? Someone who has power over nature

Tell the story of King Canute, a Viking king of England a thousand years ago, to illustrate the next miracle.

People often think of King Canute as a foolish king, who thought he could stop the sea from coming in – but actually he wasn’t foolish at all; it was his courtiers who were stupid. They were so sure he was the most powerful king around, they even boasted that if he sat in his throne on a beach, the tide wouldn’t dare come in and soak him. King Canute knew how foolish this was, so he decided to prove it to them. He arranged for his throne to be set up in the middle of the beach; then he sat down and commanded the sea not to come in. Of course, just as the king knew it would, the sea ignored him and rushed up the shore as usual. The king got wet feet, but he’d made his point to his foolish courtiers.

- We’re going to skip forward to Mark 4 to read about another of Jesus’ miracles, and see how different it is from the story of King Canute.

Read aloud Mark 4:35-41.

- Unlike King Canute, Jesus really did have power over the sea. In fact, Jesus controlled more than just the sea – he had power over the wind too. He told the wind to stop, and the waves to be still. They both obeyed him!
- No wonder Jesus’ friends were scared! They knew that only God has power over nature. But here was Jesus proving he has exactly the same power as God.

Visual aid: Add “Someone who has power over nature” to your visual aid.

4. Who is Jesus? Someone who has power over demons

- Once the storm was over, Jesus and his disciples finished crossing the lake. They landed near a place where a seriously unhappy man lived. His life had been destroyed by evil spirits. These demons made the man so terrifying that the local people tried to keep him tied up. But even when they bound him with chains, he broke loose.
- When this man saw Jesus, he ran up to him and fell on his knees. The disciples were probably very scared – but Jesus wasn’t. He’s far more powerful than any demon could ever be.

Read Mark 5:6-17.

- When Jesus told the evil spirits they must leave the man, they knew they had no

choice. They had to obey Jesus. At his command, they left the man and entered a herd of pigs instead, which rushed down the hill and drowned in the lake.

- The man himself was still at Jesus’ feet. But the demons who’d been destroying his life had left him, and he had now fully recovered. Jesus had saved him.
- Later, the man went around the area, telling people what Jesus had done for him. They were all amazed when they heard his story, and realised that Jesus had power over the same demons who had scared them so much.

Visual aid: Add “Someone who has power over demons” to your visual aid.

5. Who is Jesus? Someone who has power over death

- We’re going to dip in to one more event from Mark’s book. We’ve already seen that Jesus can forgive sins and has the power to heal. We’ve also seen he has power over both nature and evil spirits. But now his disciples were going to see Jesus proving his power over something more frightening than any of these – death itself.
- Jesus and his disciples crossed back over the lake, and again were met by a man with a problem. His name was Jairus and he was one of the rulers of the local Jewish synagogue. His problem was that his much-loved daughter was dying.
- Jesus agreed to come at once, but was delayed on the way by someone else who needed his help. No one had been able to help this lady, who had been ill for 12 years. But Jesus could – he healed her completely. But stopping to help the woman had slowed Jesus down. Just as he finished, some men arrived with a horrifying message for Jairus.

Read aloud Mark 5:35-36.

- Imagine what that must have been like for Jairus. He’s just been told that it’s too late, his daughter is dead. But now Jesus is telling him not to be afraid, but instead to believe. That would have been a terrible thing for Jesus to say if he wasn’t sure he could back it up. But he was sure. Jairus was about to discover that Jesus has power that only God himself has – power over death.

Read aloud Mark 5:37-42.

- When Jesus described this girl as “asleep”, he didn’t mean that she wasn’t really dead – she was. Jairus’ servants would have been quite sure about that before coming to him with their sad news. But Jesus knew he could bring the girl back to life just as easily as waking someone who’s asleep.
- That’s exactly what he did – he spoke to her, and she came back to life immediately. Again, everyone who saw this was astonished – Jesus really had power over death.

Visual aid: Add "Someone who has power over death" to your visual aid.

Conclusion

- Mark has shown us five amazing things about "Jesus Christ, the Son of God":
 - Jesus can forgive sins
 - Jesus has power to heal
 - Jesus has power over nature
 - Jesus has power over demons
 - Jesus has power over death
- Everyone who saw Jesus do these things was astonished, because they're things only God himself has the power to do. Only God can forgive sins. Only God has power to heal, to control nature and to command evil spirits. Only God has power over death.
- But Jesus has this power too. Mark is making something very clear to us – that Jesus is God. And if Jesus is God, then can you afford to ignore him?

Visual aid: Add "Jesus is God" to your visual aid.



OUTLINE OF TALK THREE: MISSION

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To explain that Jesus came to deal with our biggest problem: our sin.
- To define sin and show that we all sin.
- To explain the consequences of sin.
- To show that only Jesus can rescue us from our sin.

Opening

- We've seen that Jesus thinks sin is the biggest problem facing the world. We need to find out why he thinks that – but first let's make sure we understand what exactly sin is.

What is sin?

- The most common word for sin in the Bible is a word that means “missing the mark”. (If your group would find it interesting, you can tell them that this is the Greek word “hamartavo”, which literally means “missing the mark”.) Missing the mark can mean both “overstepping the mark” and “falling short of the mark”.

Illustrate this with a simple game. Choose two or three volunteers to come to the front. Give them each three balls (crunched up newspaper is fine); ask them to stand behind a mark (eg: a stick on the floor) and throw their balls into a bucket or bowl three metres away. See how many times they “miss the mark”. Alternatively, you could ask them to throw darts (preferably the velcro type) at a dartboard to make the same point.

- We saw earlier that the two commandments Jesus gave were: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and “Love your neighbour as yourself”.
- None of us live up to these two commands all the time. We all miss the mark. That's what sin is – missing the mark. Whether we're trying to meet the mark or not, none of us live up to those commands – we all sin.
- But “missing the mark” is far more serious than just missing a target in a game. So another helpful way to understand sin is as rebellion against God (Daniel 9:9).

You may like to use a crown to illustrate this point (eg: from a child's dressing-up set,

or Burger King!). Hold the crown up high and to one side (ie: not above your head). Explain that God is the real King of everyone and everything. He is the loving Creator of our world and is in charge. He is the King. Then put the crown on your head. Explain that we all prefer to be king of our life. We want to be in charge.

- We want to be in charge; we want to run our lives our own way; we want to make the rules.
- We might choose to eat ten bars of chocolate in a day; or we might choose to share our chocolate with the new boy in our class. But whatever we choose to do (whatever kind of rules we make), we're still running our lives our own way. And people who ignore the king's rules and make their own instead are actually rebels. They're rebelling against their king.
- That rebellion is what the Bible calls “sin”.
- Let's find out what Jesus has to say about sin:

*Read aloud **Mark 7:20-23**. Explain as you read that the word “unclean” means “unacceptable to God”.*

- Jesus says the problem comes from inside us – it's in our hearts. We have a heart disease. (“Heart” here doesn't mean the organ that pumps blood – it means who we are and what we're like inside.)
- The wrong things we do and say and think are the outward signs, the symptoms, of this disease – but the actual disease, the real problem, is in our hearts.
- It's our hearts that make us “unclean” – unacceptable to God.

Why is sin our biggest problem?

- There are two reasons why sin is such a problem. The first is that it messes up our relationship with God.

*Read aloud **Mark 9:43-47**.*

- Jesus warns us here that our sin will lead us to hell. And he says that's so serious it would be better to cut off any part of us that causes us to sin, than to end up in hell!
- God is our loving Creator. He is perfect and totally good. God's our loving King, but we rebel against him. We reject him as our King. Instead, we choose to run our lives our own way, as rebels.
- If we continue to reject God, then he'll respond to our decision – and he'll reject us too. We'll end up separated from him – not just now, but for ever.
- The Bible's name for this eternal separation from God is hell. That's why sin is such a serious problem – because it leads us to hell.

- So the first problem with sin is that it separates us from God and leads us to hell.
- The second problem is that we can't get rid of sin ourselves.

Ask a volunteer to come to the front – choose a leader if group members would find this embarrassing. Give them “measles” by either sticking small red stickers on their face, or using face paint to make red spots. Explain that your poor volunteer now has a very bad case of measles, but it's not a problem because you can fix it. Then produce a packet of sticking plasters/bandaids and stick one plaster over each “spot”. Ask whether this would help if it was a real case of measles – why or why not? (Note: check that your volunteer isn't allergic to rubber or plasters. If possible, choose plasters that are easy to remove!)

- Some people think they can fix their sin problem by making sure they don't do anything mean or greedy, and by doing lots of good stuff instead. But that's like sticking plasters over spots. You might be able to hide the spots, but it doesn't deal with the disease inside. Doing good stuff doesn't deal with our sinful hearts.
- So the second problem with sin is that we can't deal with it ourselves.

Jesus came to rescue rebels

- We've seen that sin is a huge problem we can't fix ourselves and which leads us to hell. That's why sin is the biggest problem facing the world.
- But Mark 1:1 tells us that Jesus is “good news”. He is good news because he came to rescue rebels.

*Read aloud **Mark 2:13-17**.*

- Who would you expect Jesus to hang around with? Maybe you'd expect him to spend his time with the good guys. With important people with lots of power. Or maybe with religious leaders.
- But here we see him enjoying a meal with a bunch of sinners – the bad guys!
- Levi was a tax collector. No one who collects money for the government is ever popular. But in those days the tax collectors worked for their enemies, the Romans. And most of them took more money than they should so they could pocket the rest. They were hated crooks.
- But here was Jesus, having a meal with them!
- The religious leaders didn't like what they saw. “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” they asked.
- Look again at Jesus' answer in verse 17. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
- When do you go to see a doctor? It's when you're ill and know you need help.

Jesus is saying he came for people who know they are sinners – people who realise they are living as rebels.

- Jesus makes it quite clear he is here for people who realise they're bad, not people who think they're good.
- Jesus came to rescue rebels who know they need his help. He understands the problem of sin and he knows what to do about it. He came to rescue us – and next time we'll see exactly how he does that.



OUTLINE OF TALK FOUR: CROSS

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To explain that Jesus knew when he was going to die. His death was no accident – it was planned.
- To explain that Jesus' death is the only way we can be rescued from God's judgment on our sin.
- To show that Jesus' death makes it possible for us to be accepted by God and enjoy a friendship with him.
- To explore the different reactions people have to Jesus' death.

Opening

Do a quick survey of the group to see how many of them are wearing or carrying some kind of symbol (eg: logos on clothing, bags, mobile phones etc.).

Display a cross (on a flipchart or powerpoint slide, or made from card and stuck to the wall).

- The cross is the symbol most strongly linked with Christianity. You'll see one inside and outside most churches, and many Christians wear a cross round their necks or pinned to a coat.
- But it's actually a bit weird to wear a cross as jewellery. It's like wearing an electric chair or a hangman's noose! A cross was an ancient torture device, designed to make death as slow and painful as possible. It's not a cosy symbol or a pretty necklace – it's a way of killing people.
- Something amazing must have happened to make people choose this terrifying killing machine as their favourite symbol. Well, something amazing did happen – and that's what we're going to be finding out about today.

Why did Jesus die?

- We've seen in our groups that Jesus knew he was going to die. He even knew when he was going to die. It wasn't an accident. He wasn't tricked. He wasn't surprised.
- Jesus spent the week before his death in Jerusalem teaching about God. He knew the religious leaders were coming for him. He knew they'd arrange to have him arrested. He knew they'd hand him over to the Romans to be killed. And he was right.

- Jesus knew when he was going to die. He also knew *why* he was going to die.

Read aloud **Mark 10:45**, explaining that "the Son of Man" is a title Jesus often used when talking about himself.

- Jesus is God's Son, with all the same power as God the Father. But he says here that he came to be a servant. He also says that he came to give his life – to die – as a ransom.

Illustrate this by asking for a volunteer and then using some thick rope to tie them to a chair. Explain that they can't free themselves – the rope is too thick to break, and they can't reach the knot – and that you'll only release them if a ransom is paid. Set an enormous price, and ask if anyone there is able to pay it. If there's been a recent kidnapping in the news, you might choose to refer to this, to make the point that real ransoms are huge, and the consequences are often deadly if the ransom isn't paid. (Don't forget to untie your volunteer at the end of this illustration!) **Note:** Be careful not to cast God as a mean kidnapper demanding a ransom. Referring back to previous weeks should help avoid that.

- Last week we saw why Jesus came – he came to rescue rebels. We also saw that we're all rebels, because we all want to live our lives our way instead of God's way. We rebel against God, our loving King.

- Jesus came to rescue rebels – and he rescues rebels by giving his life as a ransom.

What happened when Jesus died?

- Mark tells us what happened as Jesus died.

Read aloud **Mark 15:22-32**.

- Jesus was nailed to a cross of wood and left to hang there until he died. The Romans crucified people in this way as a punishment. Usually only criminals were executed by crucifixion – and, in fact, there were two robbers killed at the same time. There were three crosses in a row, with Jesus in the middle.
- Imagine if you'd been there. You'd see three men. All of them bruised and bleeding. All of them stripped of their clothes. All nailed to wooden crosses. They would all look much the same.
- But they weren't the same! The two robbers were being punished for the wrong they'd done. But Jesus hadn't stolen anything. He hadn't lied, or cheated, or hurt anyone. Jesus wasn't dying because he'd done wrong things – he was dying as a ransom for many. He was dying to rescue rebels.
- But how does Jesus' death rescue rebels? To understand that, we need to see what happened next.

Read aloud **Mark 15:33-39**.

- After Jesus had been hanging on the cross for three hours, something astonishing happened. It was the middle of the day – but suddenly it was pitch dark, a darkness that lasted for another three hours.
- In the Bible, darkness is a picture of God’s judgment and anger. This darkness was a sign that God’s anger was being poured out on Jesus. But Jesus hadn’t done anything wrong – so why was God angry? To understand that, we have to understand what was happening to Jesus while he was on the cross.

Use the following illustration to show how our sin was put onto Jesus:

What to do	What to say
<p><i>Hold up a blank DVD case.</i></p> 	<p>Imagine that someone has filmed your life and put it on DVD – but they’ve just chosen the bad stuff. Every time you’ve told a lie. Each time you let a friend down or were rude to your mum or dad. All the times you laughed at someone behind their back or took something that wasn’t yours. Imagine that they filmed every single wrong thing you did or said or thought. That would be quite a film, wouldn’t it? I certainly wouldn’t want anyone to see mine – it would show what a rebel I am.</p>
<p><i>Hold one hand out, with your palm facing the ceiling.</i></p> 	<p>Imagine that this hand is me, and that the ceiling is where God is.</p>
<p><i>Take the DVD and put it flat on your hand.</i></p> 	<p>This DVD shows all the wrong stuff I’ve ever done – it shows my sin. But when I put it here (<i>on your hand</i>), it gets in the way between me and God. It stops me from knowing God and living as his friend. That’s why sin is such a problem – it separates us from God.</p>

What to do	What to say
<p><i>Now hold the other hand out.</i></p> 	<p>Imagine that this hand is Jesus. He was perfect. He never did anything wrong – he never sinned. That means that there was nothing at all between Jesus and his Father, God. They had a perfect, loving relationship.</p>
	<p>But when Jesus was dying on the cross, this is what happened:</p>
<p><i>Move the DVD from one hand onto the other.</i></p> 	<p>All my sin was put onto Jesus. He took all my sin, and it separated him from God. That’s why he cried out in verse 34: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” For the first time ever, Jesus was separated from his Father. And God then poured out his anger at sin onto his son, as he punished Jesus for our sin.</p>
	<p>But look back at my other hand for a moment. The sin is gone – it’s been taken away by Jesus. Now there is nothing separating me from God. This is how Jesus rescues rebels. This is how Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many.</p>

- Jesus willingly went through this brutal death and the terrible separation from his Father. He chose to take the punishment for *our* sin. He was punished in *our* place, so that *we* can be rescued.
- After the three hours of darkness, Jesus gave a loud cry and died. His job was done – he had taken the punishment for our sin, he had paid the ransom for many.

- Now we can see why the cross is so important to Christians. Jesus' death was horrific. But the result of his death is wonderful. Jesus paid the ransom for many, which makes it possible for us to be accepted by God and enjoy a friendship with him.

You may want to include this question to reinforce this point: Jesus died on a Friday. What do we call that day? (Good Friday.) Jesus' death was brutal. But we call the day he died "good"! Why? Because something incredibly good came out of it. We can be accepted by God, and live as his friends, only because Jesus died as a ransom for many. You could refer back to Session 1, where it was emphasised that Christianity is good news about Jesus. The cross is the greatest example of why Christianity is good news.

How did people react when Jesus died?

- Mark tells us about a number of people who were around when Jesus died. They all reacted in different ways.

Use a simple visual aid to show these four people/groups and their four reactions (eg: on a flipchart, labels stuck on the wall or using a powerpoint presentation). Start with the visual aid blank and add each new section as you talk about it.

Pontius Pilate	Goes with the crowd
The soldiers	Wrapped up in themselves
The religious leaders	Think they don't need Jesus
The Roman centurion	Gets it right

Note: *These four reactions can be applied directly to your group members to help them think about their own response to Jesus. Depending on your group, and also the time you have available, you may choose to do that during this part of the talk, or as part of the final "Talkback" question, or not at all. Some suggestions for application are given in the closing "Talkback" question on page 69 of the Leader's Guide.*

1. Pontius Pilate

Read aloud **Mark 15:15**.

- Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor in charge of that part of Israel. He knew Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, but the crowd were yelling and shouting for Jesus to be killed. So Pilate chose to *go with the crowd* – and he handed Jesus

over to be crucified.

2. The soldiers

- The Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus were used to executing people this way. They had stripped Jesus and the two robbers of their clothes before crucifying them; so now they played a game to see who would get to keep the clothes. They didn't take much notice of the dying men – they were too *wrapped up in themselves*.

3. The religious leaders

- The religious leaders had hated Jesus for years. They were the ones who had him arrested, and stirred the crowd up to call for his death. They thought God was pleased with them the way they were. They didn't believe they needed rescuing, so they *thought they didn't need Jesus*.

4. The Roman centurion

- The last reaction we'll see came from the Roman centurion who was in charge of the executions. Like the soldiers who worked for him, he had seen loads of people get crucified. But he'd never seen anyone like Jesus. Look again at what Mark tells us.

Read aloud **Mark 15:39**.

- The centurion *gets it right*. Jesus, who'd just died in front of him, really is the Son of God. And he came to rescue rebels.
- Four reactions to the death of Jesus: Pontius Pilate goes with the crowd; the soldiers are wrapped up in themselves; the religious leaders think they don't need Jesus; and the Roman centurion gets it right.
- How about you? How do you react?



OUTLINE OF TALK FIVE: RESURRECTION

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To explain that Jesus' resurrection is a crucial part of Christianity.
- To investigate the evidence that Jesus really did die and rise again.
- To explore the consequences of Jesus' resurrection.

Opening illustration

Show the group an object with three legs or wheels, eg: three-legged stool, camera tripod, three-wheeled buggy, child's tricycle. Use an actual object if possible or, alternatively, a picture of one. Ask what would happen if one leg or wheel was removed. (The item would collapse. It might be fun to demonstrate this if you can.) Explain that the same is true for Christianity – if Jesus has not risen from the dead, it would be as if one leg/wheel was missing. The resurrection is crucial for Christians – without it, the whole of Christianity would collapse.

- Last week, we saw that Jesus came “to give his life as a ransom for many”. We saw that his death is the way Jesus rescues rebels.
- Today we're going to find out why the resurrection of Jesus matters so much. But first, we need to be sure Jesus really did die, and that he really did rise from the dead.

Did Jesus really die?

- Jesus died on a Friday afternoon. Soon the sun would go down, which would be the start of the Jewish special day, the Sabbath. This was a day of rest for Jewish people, so there was a rush to get Jesus buried before sunset.

Read aloud **Mark 15:42-47**. Ask the group to listen carefully to see who was sure that Jesus was really dead.

- An important man called Joseph of Arimathea went to see the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, and asked permission to bury Jesus.
- Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead. People who were crucified often took a very long time – even days – to die. He wanted to check it was true, so he called for the Roman centurion who'd been in charge of the execution. The centurion confirmed Jesus was dead, so Pilate allowed Joseph to take the body.
- Joseph had Jesus' body wrapped in a new piece of linen cloth and buried in a

stone tomb. The tomb was like a small cave, cut out of the rocky hillside. Jesus' body was put into the tomb, which was then sealed shut by rolling a large stone across the entrance.

- Two of Jesus' friends – two women, both called Mary – watched as Jesus was buried in the tomb.

Ask the group: “By the end of this passage, who was sure that Jesus was dead?” You may want to comment on their answers, in order to reinforce the evidence Mark gives us, eg:

Yes, Joseph was sure – he wouldn't have asked for the body otherwise.

Yes, the Roman centurion was sure – he saw Jesus die with his own eyes.

Yes, Pilate was sure – he checked with the centurion, and he knew the centurion was experienced at executing people.

Yes, the two Marys were sure – they saw Jesus' body buried in the tomb.

- There are three other Gospels in the Bible, which give us even more evidence that Jesus was really dead – but Mark has already given us plenty. We can be sure that Jesus really did die.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Illustrate this next section by showing a biography of a famous person. Choose someone your group will know about (eg: a sportsman or film star), but who is now dead. Public libraries are a good source of popular biographies. Explain that biographies mostly follow the same pattern. They start with someone's birth and childhood. They spend most of their time on the famous or important things that person did as an adult. And then they finish with their death. There's not much left to write after that, because the person's life ended with their death.

- But Jesus' life story is different. There are four biographies of Jesus in the Bible – we've been reading the one by Mark; the three others were written by Matthew, Luke and John. The biographies of Jesus are different because they don't end with his death. They all tell us that Jesus came back to life again.

Read aloud **Mark 16:1-8**.

- We already know that Jesus' body had been wrapped in linen cloth and buried in a stone tomb. Usually, spices would have been put on the body as it was wrapped. That hadn't happened this time – maybe there wasn't time in the rush to finish before the Sabbath began.
- The Sabbath lasted from sunset on Friday evening until sunset on Saturday. Jewish law said the Sabbath had to be a day of rest – so the first chance the women had to go back to the tomb and put spices on the body was early on Sunday morning (Luke 23:55-56).
- We know the women were expecting the body still to be in the tomb – they

wouldn't have bothered taking spices with them otherwise. And they wouldn't be worrying about how to move the huge stone if they didn't want to get to the body.

- But when they reached the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away and the tomb was empty. The body wasn't there!
- They didn't find a dead body. Instead they saw a young man dressed in white, an angel – a messenger from God. This angel told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was alive again!
- Later on, Jesus was seen alive by hundreds of people. They were so sure he was alive they couldn't stop talking about him. Many of them were even killed for insisting that Jesus really was alive.

Note: The Bible references for Soul all come from Mark's Gospel. However, you may like to check out some of the other evidence for Jesus' resurrection for yourself in *Matthew 28:8-20; Luke 24:13-53; John 20:10-31, 21:1-25; Acts 1:1-11, 10:39-43; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.*

- Another piece of evidence for the resurrection is that Jesus himself said it would happen. In Mark 8 Jesus says that he "must be killed and after three days rise again". He says the same thing in chapter 9 and in chapter 10. He knew he was going to die – and he knew he was going to come back to life.
- So the evidence shows that Jesus really did die and then rise again. The vital leg/wheel of the resurrection is true, so Christianity doesn't collapse.
- But why does it matter so much? Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?

Why did Jesus rise?

- The Bible gives us lots of evidence that proves the resurrection – but it's more interested in what the resurrection proves.

Use a simple visual aid (eg. on a flipchart or powerpoint presentation) to show the following:

The resurrection proves that:	death has been beaten
	Jesus will return to judge everyone
	the ransom has been paid

1. Death has been beaten

Hold up the biography you showed earlier and remind the group that this life story ends with the death of the person the book is about.

- Everyone who lives will one day die. It's one thing we can be totally certain about – we don't know when we'll die, but we know that we all will.
- But Jesus beat death! He didn't stay dead. He came back to life again. His resurrection shows death isn't the end. Death has been beaten.

2. Jesus will return to judge everyone

- To understand what happens after death, we need to look at something Jesus said before he died.
- After Jesus had been arrested, and before he was led to Pontius Pilate, he was questioned by the Jewish high priest. Jesus had something very important to say about what would happen in the future.

Read aloud Mark 14:61b-63.

- The high priest was outraged by what he heard – so steamed up that he tore his clothes to show his fury. But why was he so angry?
- When Jesus spoke about "the Son of Man ... coming on the clouds of heaven", he was talking about "The Day of Judgment". This is a day when everyone who has ever lived will have their lives judged. Jesus was saying that no matter what the high priest did to him, Jesus would be the one coming as Judge on the Day of Judgment. No wonder the high priest was furious!
- The Day of Judgment is a day when our sin will be fully displayed and we will be seen as the rebels we truly are.
- This is actually good news. If you've ever felt it's unfair that murderers and rapists seem to get away with it – the answer is that they won't. Every single person who's ever lived will be judged.
- Once, when the apostle Paul was speaking in Athens, he said that God "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The resurrection of Jesus is actually proof that the Day of Judgment will come – and that Jesus himself will be the Judge.

3. The ransom has been paid

- Of course, we will be judged on the Day of Judgment as well. We're rebels too. Every wrong thing we've said or done or thought – every time we have turned our backs on God – will be judged too. Without Jesus we would all be found guilty. But Jesus came to rescue rebels.

- Jesus said he came to give his life as a ransom for many. But how do we know the ransom was accepted? Because God brought Jesus back to life.
- God accepted Jesus' death as payment in full for our sins. Jesus died in our place. He took the punishment we deserve. When God brought Jesus back to life, he showed that he accepted Jesus' death as the ransom for many, the way for us to be forgiven (Romans 4:25).
- You can see why the resurrection is so important to Christians. It shows that those who trust in Jesus have no need to fear death and judgment. If we trust in Jesus, we can have confidence that God will raise us from death. Jesus has beaten death and the ransom has been paid.



OUTLINE OF TALK SIX: GRACE

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To illustrate the fact that most people think God will accept them because of things they have or haven't done.
- To show that God accepts us by grace alone.
- To define grace.

Opening

Ask your group to think carefully about the following question and to write down their answer. Assure them that no one will ask what they've written. There is space to write their answer on page 26 of the Soul Handbook. The question is:

If God asked you: "Why should I give you eternal life?", what would you say?

Give the group a couple of minutes to write down their answers.

- I'm not going to ask you what you wrote – but this is how most people would start...
 - You should give me eternal life because I...**
- The answer would then give different reasons why you deserve eternal life. They might be to do with...
 - *My family or country:* "because my parents are Christian"; "because I was born here"
 - *The bad things I've never done:* "I've never killed anyone."; "I don't steal"; "I've never hurt anyone"
 - *The good things I have done:* "I'm kind to animals, my friends etc"; "I give to charity"
 - *"Religious" things I do:* "I go to church or to this group", "I believe in God", "I've been baptised", "I read my Bible and pray"
- There are loads of possible answers – but they're all about something *you* have done or not done.
- But we've seen in the last few weeks that sin is a heart disease – it comes from

inside us. At heart we're all rebels – and no matter how many "good" things we do, we can't clean up our own hearts.

- The Bible tells us that everyone sins, and therefore *no one* is acceptable to God. No one deserves eternal life!

Here you could use the illustration of the good sailor. Talk about a sailor on a ship who is brilliant at what he does. He always helps his shipmates. He always obeys the captain's orders. He's a good sailor. But the ship he sails in has a skull and crossbones flying from the mast. He's a pirate! It's the same with us. Even if we're great people, we're still rebels, and will be judged by God.

- So how is it possible for us to be rescued?

Asking Jesus for help

- Mark tells us about a man who understood that Jesus was the only one who could help him.

Read aloud **Mark 1:40**. (You could get some leaders or group members to act this out to add interest, if you think it would work with your group.)

- This man had a disgusting skin disease. His face and body were covered with sores no one could cure. This skin disease made him "unclean". That meant he was an outcast – not allowed to live near anyone who was healthy. He couldn't eat food with them, or even touch them. His disease cut him off completely from friends and family. It cut him off from God, too. Someone who was "unclean" wasn't allowed in the temple or a synagogue.
- There was no cure for this skin disease. No doctor could help him. He probably could have tried to cover it up himself – hide his skin underneath clothes or even smeared himself with mud so he looked dirty rather than ill! But the truth was that even if he tried to hide it, the disease was still there. There was nothing he could do to get rid of it.
- So the man did the only sensible thing he could do – he asked Jesus for help. He asked Jesus to make him "clean".

Read aloud **Mark 1:41-42**.

- When the man asked Jesus for help, he was asking the only person who could help him. You can see how much Jesus cared for this man. He was full of compassion as he reached out and touched him. This was probably the first time this man had been touched for years – no one else would risk it. But Jesus knew he wasn't going to catch this man's disease – instead he cured it. "Be clean!" he said, and healed the man instantly.
- What did the man do to get well? Did he try and fix the problem himself? Did he buy some pills from a doctor? Did he do anything to *deserve* Jesus' help? No. All

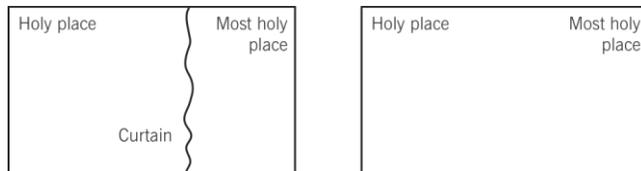
he did was ask. He asked for help from the one person who could give it.

- We're all like that man. His skin disease made him "unclean". It cut him off from family and friends, and also from God. Only Jesus could make him "clean". Our disease isn't a skin disease – but it still makes us unclean. Our sin cuts us off from God. Like the man with the skin disease, we need to ask Jesus to make us clean.

Cut off from God

- In the past few weeks we've used different pictures to help us understand the problem of sin. We've tied someone up as a hostage to think about the ransom that needs to be paid, and we've given someone measles to show that covering up the red spots doesn't cure the actual disease. But we don't need to invent a picture to show how sin cuts us off from God – because God has already made one!

Display the following diagram to show the pattern for the temple. If you have access to a white- or blackboard, use this so that you can rub out the curtain at the appropriate time. Alternatively, prepare two versions of this diagram (eg: on a powerpoint slide) so that you can show what happens.



- About 1000 years before Mark wrote his Gospel, God gave instructions to his people, the Israelites, to build a temple. It reminded the Israelites that they were God's people and God was with them. But it also had to show them that God is holy and perfect, and that nothing impure can come near to him. There was a room at one end, divided into two smaller rooms by a thick, heavy curtain. No one was allowed through that curtain into the room beyond, called the Most Holy Place. Only one man, the high priest, was allowed inside – and even he was only allowed in once a year.
- The curtain was there as a picture – to show that sin cuts us off from God. It was like a big "Do not enter" sign – a visual aid to remind people of the problem of sin.

The temple curtain

- Why have we started thinking about curtains and temples? Because Mark tells us something wonderful about what happened when Jesus died.

Read aloud Mark 15:37-38.

- The curtain in the temple is a picture of us being "unclean", unacceptable to God, cut off from him by our sin. But when Jesus died, God ripped the curtain in two, from top to bottom.

Either rub out the curtain from your diagram or display the version that shows that the curtain has been torn apart.

- This torn curtain is a wonderful picture of the way Jesus rescues rebels. Jesus' death paid the ransom for sin. He died on the cross in our place, taking the punishment we deserve. When the temple curtain was ripped in two, it showed God had accepted the ransom price. The way to God has been torn open. Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven.
- You can see why we don't need to invent a visual aid – God has already given us a brilliant one. And remember that God first gave instructions for this visual aid 1000 years before Jesus was born. All those years ago, God knew he was going to send his Son to die on a cross in our place. It was always his plan – and he designed a room with a curtain to help us understand it.

Understanding grace

- Think back to the rich man we read about earlier. His question to Jesus was: "What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" But there is nothing we can *do* to earn eternal life. God doesn't accept us because of anything we do. Instead, we need to be like the other man, the one with the skin disease. He knew he couldn't help himself. So he fell on his knees in front of Jesus, and asked Jesus to help him.
- The man with the skin disease was cut off from God and from other people. He was "unclean" and totally unable to do anything about it himself. So he asked for help, and Jesus made him clean. The man didn't deserve help – it was an undeserved gift from the only one who could help him, Jesus Christ.
- We all have a disease too – the disease of sin – which cuts us off from God. We're unclean and totally unable to do anything about it ourselves. We need to ask Jesus for help, to make us clean. We don't deserve his help – we can't do anything to earn it – it's offered to us as an undeserved gift from the only one who can help us, Jesus Christ.

Display a visual aid showing the word "Grace" and a picture of a wrapped gift.

- The word the Bible uses for this is *grace*. Grace is God's undeserved gift to us. It is God's amazing kindness to us in spite of our rebellion. It is God treating us in a way we don't deserve because of what Jesus has done.
- Everything we have learned about who Jesus is and why he came – about his death and his resurrection – happened because God planned it that way. He sent Jesus to rescue rebels. He sent his own Son to die on the cross in our place. He sent his Son as a loving, undeserved gift to us.

- And there's something else wonderful about grace. If God accepts me because of what *Jesus* has done, and not what *I* have done, then it means he still accepts me, even when I mess up.

Illustrate this with the following example: "Most of you know what it's like if you do something you're really ashamed of. Maybe you've stolen something, or told a nasty lie about someone. You can't bear what your friends would say if they knew, so you keep it to yourself. You have to pretend you've done nothing wrong because you're so scared of what they'll do if they find out."

- We can't hide anything from God – and we don't need to. We can be real with him. If God accepts us because of what Jesus has done, then he will still accept us when we mess up. If we trust in Jesus, God will forgive us and our relationship with him isn't spoiled. That's grace – God's loving, undeserved gift to us.

*Tell the group to look again at what they've written in their books as their answer to: **If God asked you: "Why should I give you eternal life?", what would you say?***

- If what you've written starts with "because I...", then you haven't really understood what Christianity is all about. This is not an answer God accepts.
- But if your answer starts "because Jesus...", then perhaps you're beginning to understand that trusting in Jesus is the *only answer that God accepts*. We can only be saved by God's grace – his loving, undeserved gift to us.

You might like to illustrate the final point of this talk by writing out the types of answers your group might give onto pieces of paper – and then shredding the ones that don't lead to eternal life.



OUTLINE OF TALK SEVEN: SO WHAT?

Use the outline below to develop your own talk. This outline can also be downloaded in PDF format from www.ceministries.org/soul.

Aim

- To remind people who Jesus is – his identity.
- To remind people that Jesus came to die – his mission.
- To explain that a Christian “must deny himself and take up his cross and follow [Jesus]” (Mark 8:34) – Jesus’ call.

Opening

- Today we’re going to look at Mark chapter 8 to find out exactly what it means to be a Christian. We’ll see that Jesus says that a Christian is someone who knows who Jesus is, understands why Jesus came and follows Jesus, whatever the cost.

1. A Christian is someone who knows who Jesus is

A visual aid will help the group follow the pattern of today’s talk. Part one should say: “A Christian is someone who knows who Jesus is.”

- You might be wondering why we’re thinking about who Jesus is yet again. After all, Mark tells us the answer right at the beginning of his book. He tells us that Jesus is the “Christ, the Son of God”. And we’ve seen plenty of evidence since then to back that up.
- But Jesus’ followers had seen plenty of evidence too – and they still needed help to see who he really is.

Use the following illustration to help your group think about seeing people in two different ways. Show them the picture (downloadable from www.ceministries.org/soul) and ask someone to tell you what they see. If they say “an old woman”, ask how many others can see an old woman. Ask if anyone can see anything else. Give them clues if necessary until all, or most of them, can see both the beautiful young woman and the ugly old woman.



- Jesus’ closest friends, the disciples, had been with him for several years. They’d seen and heard amazing things. They’d seen Jesus heal loads of people; stop a storm; control evil spirits and bring a young girl back to life. They’d listened to his teaching about God, and seen for themselves how people responded to his words. They were with him all the time and yet had never seen him do or say anything wrong, cruel or untrue.
- They’d seen and heard all this – but they still didn’t see who Jesus really was. Until one day, when at last they began to see the truth:

*Read aloud **Mark 8:27-29**.*

1a: Jesus is the Christ

- God had opened Peter’s eyes so that he could see the truth. Jesus wasn’t just a man who could do amazing things. He was the Christ – the rescuing King God had promised to send.

Illustrate this by explaining that someone was chosen as king by being anointed with oil. Either demonstrate this by holding up a small flask or jug, or simply act out pouring oil from an imaginary flask. Pretend to pour oil onto the head of a boy in your group and explain that this makes him a king, eg: “When I anoint Ryan with oil, it makes him ‘King Ryan’”. Then explain that the Greek word “Christ” means “the anointed one”. So if Jesus is the Christ, it means he is anointed as God’s chosen King. (If wanted, you could explain that this is similar to when someone is knighted – they are tapped on the shoulder with a sword, and rise as “Sir whoever”).

- Peter was right in saying that Jesus is the Christ. He is the King God had promised to send hundreds of years earlier – the King who would rescue his people.

1b: Jesus is the Son of God

- Jesus isn’t just the Christ, he’s also God’s Son. Mark’s shown us that Jesus has the power and authority that only God has. We’ve seen him forgive sins, heal people and control nature. We’ve seen that he has power over demons, and even over death itself. He has the same power and authority as God – because he is God. Even the demons shouted out that Jesus was the Son of God! (Mark 5:7) (If your group already know the story, you could also mention that God himself calls

Jesus his Son at his baptism – Mark 1:11.)

- When Peter and the others looked at Jesus, they weren't just seeing a human being – they were seeing God. Like the picture we looked at, which shows both an old and young woman – Jesus was both a man and also God.

Add the following to your visual aid: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

2. A Christian is someone who understands why Jesus came

Part two of the visual aid should say: "A Christian is someone who understands why Jesus came:"

- You can imagine how excited Peter and the others must have been when they realised that Jesus is the promised King they'd been waiting for. But Jesus had a shock for them:

Read aloud Mark 8:30-31.

- "The Son of Man" is a name Jesus often used when talking about himself. It comes from the Old Testament book of Daniel – from one of the many promises about God sending his chosen King. It says that "one like a son of man" will be king for ever (Daniel 7:13-14). So when Jesus uses the name "The Son of Man", he's confirming that he really is the Christ, God's promised King.

2a: Jesus came to die

- But then Jesus said something that would have shocked his followers to the core.
 - He was going to suffer
 - He would be rejected by the religious leaders
 - He would be killed.
- He didn't even say it *might* happen – he said it *must* happen.
- Peter was stunned. Surely this couldn't be right? Wasn't Jesus the King who was going to rescue them? So Peter dragged Jesus off to have a quiet word.

Read aloud Mark 8:32-33.

- Isn't that a bit harsh? Peter was only saying he didn't want Jesus to die. So why does Jesus call him Satan?
- Peter had the wrong kind of king in mind. He wanted Jesus to rule as king in Israel, and to kick out the hated Romans. Jesus calls these ideas "the things of men" – a human king ruling over a physical country.
- But Jesus knew that he had come to die. That was how he was going to rescue his people, by giving his life as a ransom for many. That was God's plan – the "things of God", as he calls it. But the devil always wants to spoil God's plans.

He would have been delighted if Jesus had chosen to become Peter's kind of king. Peter was saying exactly what Satan wanted.

2b: Jesus came to take the punishment we deserve

- Why did "the things of God" mean that Jesus had to die? Because it was the only way to solve the problem of sin; the only way to rescue us from God's judgment. Jesus died in *our* place, taking the punishment *we* deserve. This was the only way we can be forgiven; the only way sinful people can be brought back into a relationship with God.

Add the following to your visual aid: "Jesus came to die in our place, taking the punishment we deserve."

3. A Christian is someone who follows Jesus

Part three of the visual aid should say: "A Christian is someone who follows Jesus:"

- A Christian isn't just someone who knows who Jesus is and why he came – even Satan knows those things. A Christian is someone who follows Jesus, whatever the cost.

Read aloud Mark 8:34.

Ask the group: What do you think it means to "deny ourselves"? Listen to their suggestions, then build them in where possible to what you say next. This will help you to add some concrete examples to the explanation of "denying ourselves".

- It doesn't mean denying who we are, or pretending we're something we're not. It means no longer living for ourselves and our own selfish desires. Instead, it means living for Jesus and for others. It means putting Jesus first in every part of our lives. It means Jesus comes first in how we use our time and spend our money. It means we care about what others need, rather than what we want – just as Jesus did.

Show a picture of a cross, or of someone carrying a cross. Remind your group that the cross was an ancient torture device. The Romans used it as a way of publicly and painfully killing people. In those days, if you saw someone carrying a cross, you knew they were on their way to their own execution.

- Anyone carrying a cross was going to suffer. They would be publicly humiliated; they would be insulted and laughed at; they would be stripped and beaten; and they would die a slow, painful death. So why does Jesus say that anyone who follows him must take up their cross?
- If we follow Jesus, we should expect to suffer. We may find that our friends or family laugh at us and try to make us give up living as a Christian. We might find ourselves cut off from people we used to spend time with. If we try to tell people about Jesus, they may refuse to listen and make fun of us for believing in him.

And there are plenty of examples in history and today of people who lose their jobs, their families and even their lives for Jesus. (If you want, you could give a modern illustration of Christians facing persecution. Examples can be found at www.barnabasfund.org)

- Taking up our cross means being prepared to follow Jesus, whatever the cost.

Add the following to your visual aid: "A Christian is someone who follows Jesus, whatever the cost."

- If the cost is going to be so high, why would anyone choose to follow Jesus? He gives us a convincing reason in the next few verses:

*Read aloud **Mark 8:35-38**.*

- Jesus isn't saying that you need to literally die, but that the way to save your life is actually to lose it. If we give our lives to Jesus, he will save them.
- One of the things the resurrection proves is that Jesus is coming back one day, to judge everyone who has ever lived. We don't know when it will be, but we do know he's coming. And when he comes, he'll treat us as we have treated him. If we've rejected him – if we're ashamed of him and his words – he'll be ashamed of us and will reject us.
- But if we give our lives to Jesus, he'll save us. We will know and enjoy God now, as our loving heavenly Father. And we can look forward to eternity with him when we die.

Conclusion

Refer back to the finished visual aid.

- So that's what a Christian is:
 - Someone who knows who Jesus is
 - Someone who understands why Jesus came
 - Someone who follows Jesus, whatever the cost.
- Jesus calls each one of us to follow him.
- Some of you may already be sure that you're Christians and that you're living for Jesus. If that's you, I hope this course has helped you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, and think more deeply about what it means to live for him.
- Some of you may feel you don't know enough yet to make a decision about Jesus. If so, I'll give you some suggestions later of ways you can carry on finding out about Jesus.
- But some of you may realise that you're ready to start following Jesus now. If that's you, there will be an opportunity to do that at the end of this session.