

STUDY 1

Jesus – Son of God

The object

The object of this study is to introduce people to Jesus, especially his early ministry. We look at his authority and miracles as pointing to his status as the divine Son of God.

At the beginning

- You will need inexpensive New Testament, (or similar) to hand out where indicated below. Try to use a modern translation such as the Good News Bible.
- Warm introduction to welcome everyone.
- Explain that, although the course is being organised by 'Church X', you are not wanting to push any particular denominational line. Rather, you will be looking at those facts on which there is general agreement among the churches.
- Assure them, 'You won't be asked to pray, or read the Bible out loud or asked to answer questions — there will, however, be ample opportunity for discussion.'
- Encourage them to do the whole six weeks as each study leads on to the next.
- Ask if there are any questions about how the group is to operate.

THE FIRST STUDY

1. Four opening statements

- The title of this course is *Christianity Explained*
- Christianity, as the name implies, is all about Jesus Christ.
- The only records we have of Jesus are the four biographies — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- Over the next few weeks we will be looking at one of these, the Gospel of Mark. (Give out New Testaments and help the group to find Mark.)

2. Study

Begin by looking at Mark 1:1. 'This is the good news about Jesus Christ the Son of God.' What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Son of God? We will see today that it means that Jesus is a person with authority — all the authority of God his Father.

In order, look up these passages making brief comments on each.

(a) MARK 1: 21–28. JESUS' AUTHORITY AS A TEACHER

The people were surprised at the method of Jesus' teaching. He did not quote the thoughts of other Rabbis or teachers. His characteristic way of teaching was, 'I say to you...'

(b) MARK 2: 1–12 JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS

At just a word this man was instantly healed. The Bible contains over 30 such incidents — the sick, blind, lame, lepers were healed. You might ask the group if they have an experience of spiritual healing — if nothing else the question might be a good 'ice-breaker'.

Mark's Gospel contains many such examples of Jesus' extraordinary authority:

- In a violent storm, he stood up in a boat and commanded the wind and waves to die down, and they obeyed.
- He healed demon-possessed people with a word.
- On three recorded occasions he raised up dead people — even Lazarus who had been dead four days .

(c) MARK 2:1-12. JESUS' AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

Jesus said to the man: 'Your sins are forgiven.' The religious leaders rightly saw this as a claim to be equal with God. The rest of the New Testament tells us that Jesus is indeed equal with God as God's Son — more than that, he is both God and

man in the one person. (Emphasise this point.)

So this is the picture we are building up. Jesus has come into God's creation, God's world, with the full authority of God. There is no part of the creation — animate, inanimate, human or spiritual — over which Jesus does not rule. As God in human form, he also forgives sins. However, there is one more area of Jesus' authority we need to consider.

(d) MARK 1:16-20, JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER PEOPLE

Jesus went to almost complete strangers and commanded them to leave their jobs and families and to follow him.

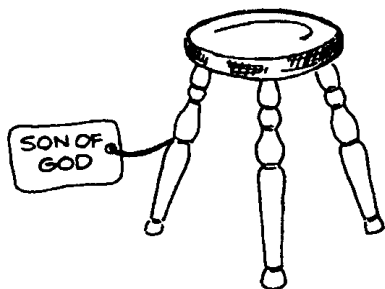
As the Son of God, Jesus makes the same claim over your life and mine. He calls ordinary people like us to follow him. These four men did. Some whom Jesus called later refused to follow him. In the whole of creation Jesus' authority is never resisted, except by the wills of human beings! God, however, commands us to submit to the authority of His Son. (Emphasise that we are not advocating that they should leave their family or spouse.)

3. Summary

We have seen in this study:

- Great authority as God's Son. He is the supreme master in God's world.
- His claim to be divine
- The need to come to a decision about him. Someone called Jesus the man you can't ignore. You can reject him as a liar, dismiss him as a lunatic or serve him as the Lord.

Introduce the idea of the three-legged stool—the three fundamental concepts which are at the heart of the Christian message.



4. Homework

Ask the group to read Mark chapters 1 to 5. You can photocopy the reading plan onto the back of the handout. They should note any passages which they do not understand or which they would like to discuss. There will be time to discuss their questions and insights at the beginning of next week's study. Distribute handout summary sheet no.1. A clear master for photocopying purposes is supplied later in this book.

FLASH CARD LAYOUT

Lay these out on the carpet or coffee table as the study proceeds.

JESUS' AUTHORITY...

...AS A TEACHER

... OVER SICKNESS

...OVER NATURE

...OVER EVIL SPIRITS

... OVER DEATH

...TO FORGIVE SINS

... OVER PEOPLE
(you and me!)