

THE WAY OF JESUS

by Dr Bruce Farnham

English version: Lion Paperback, 1986, 208pp .

Arabic version: Sabiil il-Messih, Dar Minhal Elhai, 1988, 200pp.

A Summary by I.L.

Note: It is important to grasp the illustrations that are scattered throughout the book. I have made a point of mentioning them in this summary. Any of my own comments are in [square brackets]. The book covers a lot of ground. Every chapter is extensively referenced to the scriptures, and these references are listed at the end of each chapter. The book is a good blend of narration and explanation. I have quoted from the book frequently, and attempted to make the summary detailed enough so that someone could know enough about each section to be able to discuss the contents with someone who had read the full version in Arabic.

For a quick summary read the headings!

INTRODUCTION

1. Many people coming to so-called Christian countries are surprised to discover that a large number are Christian only by name, not in reality.
2. Everyone should know something about the great religious leaders of the world.
3. I (the writer) am a scientist by training, but I am not an unbiased observer. I think you would prefer to read about Jesus from a friend rather than an enemy.
4. I have tried to present what most

Christians believe about Jesus. The sources are the New Testament. Referencing is explained.

5. You will notice that I generally refer to Jesus without giving him any special title... This is not out of disrespect. It is simply that I believe "real" respect is shown to Jesus, not by giving him special titles, but by considering seriously what he taught.

Chapter 1: THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS

The events are carefully and graphically described, and interpreted in terms of the political context of Palestine, the historical events, and the local customs. The question of the miraculous conception in the light of modern science is briefly and simply dealt with.

If God chooses to do something highly unusual, it is not a question of 'faith contradicting science' — simply that science is inadequate to examine a rare historical event. It is not science that we should be thinking about when considering a miracle, but whether the eyewitness of the event is trustworthy in what he reports (p11).

Concerning why little is known about Jesus' childhood, appearance etc.

The Gospel writers are not biographers in the modern sense of that term. They are deliberately selec-

tive. They focus on those parts of the life of Jesus which will help us to understand who he really was and why he came. ...Why? The reason is simple. The Gospel-writers do not want us to be distracted from the main point. ... As time passes, all kinds of stories grow up around famous people who have died, stories which are often passed on and believed by later generations. That is why it is so important to listen to those who knew Jesus personally and lived with him over a period of several years (p17-18).

Chapter 2: THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' PUBLIC LIFE

John the Baptist: origin & message. Briefly distinguished from the Essenes (enough to answer anyone who might have heard of them, not enough to distract). JB came to prepare the way for Jesus,

- by calling the people back to true obedience to God's Law. Repentance and baptism explained.
- by pointing to Jesus as the one to be followed. Lamb of God. Briefly, sacrifice and passover.

The baptism of Jesus: an act of identification with the whole human race. Dove as sign and seal of God's approval. Ps 2:7 + Is 42:1 explained. The Messiah is to be both a servant and a king.

The temptation of Jesus: Satan attempted to persuade Jesus to forget his role of a servant. The 3 tests are described, then as a whole compared

with Gn 3:1-7. Disobedience led to a "cancerous alienation".

Satan wanted to catch Jesus in the same selfish trap of self-centred power seeking with which he had caught the rest of the human race. But Jesus refused to be caught. ... The goal of his life was true submission to God. He refused to allow his kingly powers to be used for selfish ends. He refused to separate the fact of his kingship from the fact of being a servant (p27).

Jesus calls the 12 disciples: a cross section of ordinary people. Brief section to link up with the next chapter.

Chapter 3: JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD (K.O.G.)

K.O.G. described as the reign and authority of God, which was about to break into the world in a way that it had never done before.

The dynamic of the kingdom: miracles that flowed from compassion. Jesus touched a leper. Pool of Bethesda ... We are like this man ... do you want to get well? For those so possessed by demons that they no longer had control over their own destiny, Jesus confronted the demonic powers directly. Two examples briefly described.

Jesus came to proclaim deliverance from all satanic powers (p36).

The ethics of the kingdom: The sermon on the mount as a summary, stressing that God's Law demands nothing less than perfection.

And we can only start on the path to perfection by first realizing our

own spiritual bankruptcy and inability to achieve perfection by our own strength (p37).

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

The K.O.G. is a kingdom which challenges us with total submission to God of our whole beings, including our mind, will, and conscience. Anything less than that is not real submission at all.

God's demands are impossible. Need to recognise our own spiritual poverty.

The seed of the kingdom: God's k. begins in small ways but ends up big. Seed. Yeast. If God's k. is so powerful, why didn't God end all wars and set up a new k. with only the people ready to obey him? The answer is the seed, which grows, and it all takes time.

The cost of the kingdom: (brief). The K.O.G. is only for those who seek it wholeheartedly. It is hard for the rich to enter.

Chapter 4

JESUS CLASHES WITH FALSE RELIGION

Many clashes due to jealousy of the Jewish leaders. Jesus did not attack Jewish religion. Instead, he kept returning to the meaning of God's law.

In doing this he clashed with one of the popular concepts of 'religion' itself—that the main point of religion is to keep certain rituals and observances which are supposed to please God.

Clashes over the Sabbath.

God was more interested in compassion and the healing of sick

bodies than in the details of religious regulations.

Several healings mentioned, and how leaders disliked it and began plotting Jesus' death.

Clashes over prayer. Brief. Public prayer to show how religious we are, prayer with many words, prayer with special postures, is not prayer. God is interested in the motives of our hearts.

Clashes over fasting. Brief. Emphasis on the motivation behind the fasting.

Clashes over cleanliness. (ceremonial washing).

Cleansing the outside is very easy, but what about the inside? (p47).

Clashes over the temple. Jesus uses force.

No one who really honoured God's name could possibly allow such desecration of a holy place. ... God's temple was a house of prayer for ALL nations.

Jesus was no weakling, tough enough to drive out the tradesmen without himself being killed by them. [One point I missed, was that the courtyard was where non-Jews could worship, and they could not because of the traders. This extra detail might have reinforced the points being made].

Clashes with religious hypocrisy. Mt 23. Scorn for religious leaders with special names and clothes. Look how much some have departed from what Jesus taught.

Remember though that motives are the key.

Nothing wrong with a title to signify a

job. Brief comments on swearing and giving. Pharisees accused of being 'snakes' and a 'brood of vipers', of being clean on the outside but filthy inside. How much this is true today.

Jesus was never afraid to speak out clearly and to confront the hypocrisy of all our hearts. The kingdom of God is like a brilliant light which shows up the dust and dirt in our lives. No one can escape its blinding glare (p51).

Chapter 5:

JESUS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

One of the problems about examining the teachings of Jesus Christ is that most people connect him so closely with 'Christianity' (p53)!

Good explanation given.

Did Jesus have a political programme? Brief.

His teaching and mission on earth were far more radical than a limited political programme which would have relevance only for a certain economic structure and moment in history. This is because the K.O.G. deals with the heart of man and the very roots of his dilemmas, not just with adjustments in his environment (p54).

Jesus focused on 5 points:

The absolute worth of the individual. Jesus grew up in a strong community. Yet he still valued individuals, especially the poor and oppressed, e.g. stopping to heal the woman, when en route to heal the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue; e.g. the woman of Samaria; e.g. calling women 'daughters

of Abraham'; e.g. valuing children. Finishes the section with a warning against individualism.

The blasphemy of racialism. Longish. Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The curse of riches. Rich young man. Relates to the question of serving two masters.

The futility of violence. Jesus could have precipitated an armed revolt.

But violence is a hopeless tool for winning the allegiance of people's hearts. This is precisely why Jesus came—to win the allegiance of people's hearts for the K.O.G. (p68).

Examples of refusing to call fire down on villages that rejected them, and refusing to fight when he was arrested.

The reality of judgement. This will include judgement of all the words, acts and thoughts of everyone. Decisions we make in this life are irreversible.

So in this life nothing is random. Nothing is meaningless. Justice has eternal significance. ... This is the awesome responsibility of being a human being made by God(p72).

Chapter 6:

THE TEACHING OF JESUS ABOUT GOD AND OURSELVES

What Jesus taught about God

- God is one.
- God is spirit.
- God is all-powerful.
- God is totally good.
- God is like a heavenly Father. This is explained, with the OT roots. Words act like models of reality. Two sparrows sold for a penny. God is not, however,

the Father of everyone. It is the task of the children of the k. to be like their heavenly Father.

- God is holy. This does not refer to God being different or distant, but that God is a totally blinding purity. (phrase used in translation: *Tuhr Kaamil*, therefore *Tahuur*, circumcision).

His 'holiness' referred to his specific and consistent opposition to ALL evil and ALL sin of any kind. Trying to bring any hint of sin, impurity, or unholiness into his presence is as impossible as mixing oil and water. You might as well try to throw black lumps of coal into the sun and not let them burn (p80).

- God is love. Parable of the lost sheep.
- God is all-knowing.
- God is a knowable God: communication, understanding, appreciation.

What Jesus taught about people

- The world is a disaster area. All the human race was viewed by Jesus as in the grip of Satan's power, and afflicted with a fatal problem.
- The real problem is within us. The real cure is not the need for better health, or better education.

Economic changes are the answer to some huge problems, but they are not the answer to THE problem: that of human nature (p88).

- We are slaves to sin. 'Sin' explained. Many define sin according to what we do not do instead of what we do. Jesus saw sin as rooted in the very nature of human beings.

It (sin) is the fact that we naturally put our own selves, our own wishes, our own plans and our own self-importance in the middle of our

lives, right in the place where God should have the central place. If true worship is putting God first in our lives, then sin is just the opposite—the putting of our egos first. In fact that is what breaking the first commandment is all about: 'You shall have no other gods apart from me' (p92).

If slavery to unbelief is incredible, re-read the Sermon on the Mount. Illustration of a man who tried to reach the sun by climbing mountains.

- Man's amazing potential: Brief. Heading is misleading, this section is really a summary.

Chapter 7:

FOUR GOSPELS OR ONE?

How can we know that the New Testament we have today gives us the original teachings of Jesus?

A corrupted NT? Two views described.

First, an angel dictated the Injil to Jesus. Christian priests later changed parts of it, especially those parts related to the claims of Jesus. ⇒ several contradictory NT's began to circulate. The Nicean council of 325AD met, chose one version, and burnt the rest. **Second**, at this council, they chose the 'four gospels' which they published as one book, even though the four contradict each other. Four gospels explained, four reliable writers, with different readerships in mind.

When was the NT written? A sample of the documentary evidence stated briefly, with the fact of 32000 quotations by 325AD.

Why four accounts? Like four cameras

of the same event. Then the line of argument switches, appealing to our belief that God is able to preserve His holy books. 325AD explained. Where is the evidence of corruption? Translations are important, for God is the God of all nations.

Chapter 8:

**HOW DID THE DISCIPLES VIEW
THE CLAIMS OF JESUS?**

Can God do anything?

We must beware of trying to dictate to God how he should or should not act in this world.

We must be careful to look at ALL the data we have, and not exclude some just because it does not fit.

What did the disciples believe? The 12 disciples were, like Jesus, passionate monotheists, with simple but strongly held views, highly resistant to change.

The miracles. No one contested that they happened, though the Pharisees interpreted them as coming from Satan. Many people took the miracles as an indication that Jesus was from God.

Jesus the prophet. Nain miracle. 5000 fed. Jesus claimed he was a prophet.

Jesus forgives sin. Paralysed man on a mat let down through the roof. Prostitute breaking the jar of perfume, story told with Jesus' story of two men who owed money.

Jesus' power over nature. Sea calmed. Jesus walked on water.

Jesus as sinless.

Jesus as the Son of Man. Jesus is human. Jesus as servant. Jesus as

having Authority, e.g. to forgive sins, to be future judge.

Jesus as the Messiah, "the anointed one" explained. Jesus=Saviour. Glorious king and suffering servant.

A pause for thought. The connection between Jesus and God. Illustration of living in 'flat land', two dimensions. There are three widely separated holes. Only given the extra dimension, and a flexible pipe that goes through all three holes, can it be seen that the three rings are one. The purpose of the illustration is to show how we CANNOT understand God in this present world. Therefore we should be suspicious if there are no paradoxes. Examples given from modern physics concerning the structure of matter and the origins of the universe. The ideas are presented and labeled as "mind-stretching". How much more so revelation about God! But maybe Jesus was only claiming that God's power was flowing through him in a new and special way. Jesus said other things making such a view untenable, e.g. Bread of Life, I AM, Jesus praying 'Father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you **before the world began**' (Jn 17:5). Others cited.

These claims are not the same as saying that God has a partner. He was claiming, rather, that he was of the same essence as God.

Appeals to the reader to understand the claims, not necessarily to agree with them at this point. But the data only makes sense when we understand Jesus as being completely human and completely divine. Otherwise how could he forgive sins, etc.?

So there is simply no way in which you can say that Jesus was just another religious teacher with an important ethical message for mankind. Nor can you believe that he was only a prophet (p129).

Jesus as the Son of God. No physical meaning. Used for some of the OT kings, and became known as a reference to the Messiah. 'Son of' = 'has the same character as'.

Why are the claims of Jesus so important? (Brief link section to the next chapter).

Chapter 9:

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Did God abandon his 'chosen one', or was the death against God's will? Misuse of the cross symbol by Christians, including the Crusades. Recapitulation of the non-violent nature of the K.O.G.. Could God allow Jesus to suffer so cruel a death? First though, did he die? If he did not, the question of how God allowed it becomes irrelevant.

Did Jesus die on a cross? First look at the evidence from those who did NOT believe in Jesus.

- The letter of Mara bar Serapion. AD73.
- Josephus. Born AD 37. Jew, finished a Pharisee.
- Tacitus. Roman historian and governor.
- Thallus.
- Lucian.
- Rabbinical literature. Talmud.

How did Jesus die? Jesus knew he

would die, and timed his arrival in Jerusalem with the Jewish passover feast. Origins of the passover summarised, especially the symbolism of sacrifice.

The blood represented the death of an innocent animal in place of the death of a sinful person.... Death, or separation from God, was an inevitable consequence of sin. The person carrying out the sacrifice recognized that there was nothing HE could do to remove his own sin. If fellowship with God was to be restored, the sin had to be paid for in death. It could be removed only through the sacrificial death of another (p142).

Lord's supper explained. Jesus arrested, betrayed, questioned, sentenced, flogged, mocked, crucified. Cross as an instrument of torture. Jesus forgave the soldiers. Jesus refused to seek deliverance. He died in front of his mother, brothers, and a few disciples, and his enemies. Three hours of darkness. Curtain torn and significance briefly explained. Blood and water from the spear wound. Burial in 34kg spices, tomb sealed.

Why did Jesus die?

- Jesus died for blasphemy.
- Jesus died as an example, of how to accept suffering.

Accepting suffering as Jesus did is not a sign of weakness but a sign of power (p151).

- Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin. Dead sea scrolls, copy of Is 53 known to predate Jesus therefore could not have been altered by his followers. Large

parts quoted, and referred to and commented on later. Sacrifice of Abraham's son (name not mentioned). Angel's words to Joseph. Song of Simeon. John the Baptist. Jesus the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Meaning of the death explained: to take away the sin of others. But surely God can just forgive? God is love. God is just. Two pages of explanation.

Story of Judge sentencing his son to 50 lashes, then taking them. At several points the belief that 'we're not that bad' is dealt with.

Every person in God's k. enters on God's terms, not his own (p158).

Parables of hired men in a vineyard, where all got the same wage. Parable of the king's banquet, where one guest did not have the wedding clothes which were provided.

The cross is about people receiving something that they do not deserve. The cross is God's sacrifice for sin for all time, for all people in all places. And the only way we can receive the benefits of that sacrifice is as a gift from God. We cannot earn it (p159).

How did the resurrection happen? Main events described. The disciples were not hallucinating, for they did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead.

Why did Jesus rise from the dead? Jesus had to!

A somewhat fanciful story of a planet with deadly rays in it that affect the mind. A visitor from another planet comes, who is not affected by the rays. He throws himself on the source,

destroys it, and dies in the act. But then, with the rays defeated, he comes back to life and can deliver those who come to him so that they no longer need to be affected by the continuing reflections of the rays. One day the reflections too will disappear. This story shows how through the death and resurrection of Jesus, both the penalty and power of sin were broken. The disciples were to proclaim the path of true submission to God through Jesus. It means admitting that we need God's help; allowing God into our lives to change us; waging war against Satan, beginning with giving up charms etc.

Chapter 10:

THE ASCENSION AND COMING AGAIN OF JESUS: Basic facts.

Who or what was the Holy Spirit? Simply explained, in the context of the need for Him to come, and what he would do, and of the events before the ascension.

The gift of the Holy Spirit. Basics: Pentecost. 'Repent and be baptised' explained.

Because he loves **all** people from **all** nations so much, God is offering all those who really repent of their sin, free forgiveness and the free gift of His Holy Spirit to change their lives and make them holy. Let us never think that this is an easy step to take. Imagine inviting a king to come and stay with you. It is easy to ask him into your home. But once the king has entered, the cost of giving hospitality to your guest is enormous! Everything in your home must be at his disposal. All your

wealth, food and time must be given up to honouring your royal visitor. So it is when someone asks King Jesus into their lives. He comes in by His Spirit quite freely. But His presence costs everything that the person is and has. That is what God's kingdom is all about (p176).

The results of His coming explained, especially boldness, fruit, (gifts mentioned in passing).

The Trinity.

... the 'threeness' in the oneness of God's being began not as some philosophical speculation, but as a direct result of the experience in history of the disciples as they knew the reality of both Jesus and, later on, the Holy Spirit (p179).

Especially important is that the roles in the salvation of man are distinctive (p179).

Reiteration of nominal and real Christianity.

The second coming of Jesus. Main events. Hell is not a preparation for heaven. Focal point of heaven is the presence of God. Jesus' coming will be unexpected, and we must be ready. The author restates that

the good news about the kingdom of God was equally for all nations (p185).

Chapter 11:

HOW TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

How do we submit to God's rule or reign over us?

Step 1. Recognising certain facts:

- God is absolutely holy and entering

his kingdom means that we are willing to accept the standards of his holiness for our lives.

- We have fallen far below the standards of God's holiness.
- We cannot go to heaven by means of our good deeds.

Doing more and more good deeds does not solve the cancer of sin (p189).

Illustration of jumping a ravine, and falling short by 20, 5, or 1 metre.

• Jesus is God's way of salvation. Concerning the claims of Jesus, either they are true, or they are complete rubbish, and a set of lies. Therefore, you cannot accept the morality of Jesus without also accepting his claims. [Caution, I think someone would argue back that Jesus never made such claims, but rather his disciples. Be ready for this.] Reiteration of the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Step 2. Counting the cost: Return to the story of the young rich man, told to sell all.

Step 3. Repentance: 'About turn' order to a soldier.

Step 4. Faith: the humble trust of a child. Faith is more than just agreeing to certain beliefs.

Faith means trust, commitment, obedience, that act of will whereby you stake your whole life on the word of another (p197-8).

Illustration of a tightrope walker, who walked across the Niagara Falls, then offered to carry someone across.

It is not faith itself which saves us.
It is the object of our faith which is

the key... Faith is that agreement, commitment and humble trust whereby we accept God's plan of salvation through Jesus for our lives. It means relying on him for forgiveness as you come to God in repentance. ...Faith is not trying to believe in something even though there is little evidence for it, but rather the response of our wills to the overwhelming evidence which faces us(p198-9).

When you enter the kingdom of God, certain crucial changes take place.

- God forgives all your sins.
- God justifies you. Legally declared righteous.

- God makes you his child.
- God gives you his Holy Spirit.
- God promises you eternal life.
- From now on we enjoy fellowship with God. Love is central, just as a marriage relationship is based on love not law.
- We become part of a worldwide community of those who share a common life.
- Communal worship (Jesus gave no rules, so forms can vary).
- Love. Are we ourselves willing to be touched by God's love?