

MEETING 3

THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

Review of previous session

Review the 5 main reasons for suffering in the world.

Question

If you were God, how would you solve the problem of suffering and death?

Sharing in the group

Tell how you would solve the problem of suffering and death.

Tell what you are currently doing about it.

Teaching from the Bible

Man cannot solve the problem of suffering and death. Many attempts have been made to tackle this problem, but without success.

Finally, God has taken five steps through Jesus Christ as Mediator to solve the problem of suffering and death.

A. THE FIRST STEP: JESUS CHRIST BECAME A HUMAN BEING

1. God became a human being.

Read John 1:1,14-18; John 14:7-10; Philippians 2:5-7; 1 John 1:1.

Jesus Christ is God, but also took on the human nature. He is God Who humbled himself and took on a human likeness, entered his own creation and came to live among people on earth. He came as close as possible to lost and suffering mankind. He listened to them, understood them, felt compassion for them, spoke to them and helped them. He was a real Person in the history of the world. Thousands of people knew him personally, have seen his miracles with their own eyes, have heard his teachings with their own ears, have felt him with their own hands and have personally experienced his work of salvation! Jesus Christ identified himself with their feelings, problems, temptations and suffering.

2. He came to people in the world.

Why is going to someone who suffers better than only sending him a message?

Read Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 7:20-23; Acts 10:37-43. A doctor does not merely send a telephone text to wish you well, but goes to his patient to heal him! Likewise, God does not merely send a messenger or prophet to suffering mankind on earth. No, he goes himself to suffering mankind in the world! Only by God becoming Man can God really and completely identify with man, empathise with their feelings and problems, and be subjected to their temptations and sufferings. Jesus became completely as human beings except for two things:

- In his human nature *he had no human father*. He was born as a human from the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-35).
- He *remained perfectly sinless* (Hebrews 4:15). Like other people, he was tempted, but never sinned.

As other human beings, he experienced hunger and thirst, was oppressed and persecuted, felt pain and grief. As other human beings, he suffered. God became Man in Jesus Christ in order to identify himself with suffering people on earth.

Why was his appearance as a Man more important than appearing as a “god”?

Jesus Christ appeared among people as a human being and not as a myth or shady apparition of a “god” (as for example the Hindu gods and Buddhist enlightened ones). If he did, he could not have identified himself with human beings! He would not have been acceptable to people in human history.

Summary. God’s way to solve the problem of sin, suffering and death was to BECOME A HUMAN BEING HIMSELF, enter his own creation and human history to identify himself with people and their problems of sin, needs, suffering and death. No “god” in any other religion did that!

B. THE SECOND STEP: JESUS CHRIST BECAME A SERVANT

1. Becoming a servant.

How would the coming of Jesus Christ as a Ruler be different from his coming as a Servant?

Read. Mark 10:42-45. Jesus Christ did not come as a mighty ruler into this world, but as a humble servant. If he had come as a mighty ruler, he could have used his position, power and riches to force people to serve him.¹

And people would have served him for many selfish reasons: to gain esteem and a standing with him, or power and special privileges from him.

¹ As some religions that bribe people with money and privileges or force them with the sword to change their religion!

However, Jesus Christ came into the world, not as a mighty ruler, but as a humble servant. He came, not to be served, but to serve. He did not threaten, but taught. He used no violence, but convinced. Jesus Christ did not threaten, but taught the people. He never used force, but persuaded people. He did not show favouritism to the mighty and influential or to the rich and famous, but he especially associated with the suffering and the needy, and with the outcasts and sinners.

2. Serving brings suffering.

How did Jesus Christ set an example of servanthood to his followers?

Read Luke 5:29-32; Luke 7:18-22; Luke 19:7,10; John 13:4-5,12-15. Jesus Christ came into the world to heal the sick, to make the blind see, to cause the lame to walk, to cure the lepers, to make the deaf hear, to raise the dead, to preach the good news to the poor and call all sinners to repent. He came into the world to save people from their sins and suffering.

But also his serving cause suffering. People did not want to change and did not want to serve. Instead they spoke evil of Jesus Christ and resisted him, because he helped the needy.

do you still remember why there is so much suffering in the world? people suffer, because they are godless and unrighteous. People suffer, because no one wants to serve! There is so much suffering in the world, because people want to rule over others, but do not want to be a servant to anyone! Everyone desires to be served by others!

However, Jesus Christ came to serve. He came to save people from their sins and their suffering. God's method to solve the problem of sin and suffering is to serve!

The washing of feet was an example. Washing the dirty feet of people at the entrance was customary the duty of the lowest slave in the house. None of his disciples wanted to be the least by washing the feet of the others. But Jesus Christ took the place of the lowest servant and washed the feet of his disciples. *Only Jesus Christ was willing to be the lowest slave and manage the dirtiest jobs.* As the Highest Lord over everything in creation, he made himself the lowest slave on earth! As the greatest teacher of all people he taught not merely by reciting revelations, but by setting an example of service. Jesus Christ is the best Example of a Servant! He gave people an unforgettable example!

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering of man by BECOMING A SERVANT HIMSELF, who was willing to tackle the lowest, dirtiest and most difficult tasks. He tackled the problem of suffering and the brokenness of man on earth. He came to seek what was lost and to heal what was broken.

C. THE THIRD STEP: JESUS CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS

Introduce: According to Philippians 2:5-8, Jesus Christ humbled himself in three steps downward:²

- First, he humbled himself as God and took on the human nature
(*He possessed the divine nature from eternity, but added the human nature in history*)
- Second, he humbled himself among all people by becoming their servant.
- Third, he humbled himself to the very lowest place by dying on a cross as if he were a criminal.

Read the Bible passages below and **discuss** the questions below.

1. A sacrifice is absolutely necessary.

- **The Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the absolute necessity of atonement.**

Why was a sacrifice absolute necessary in the past?

Read Leviticus 20:26; Leviticus 4:1-7,20 and Hebrews 9:16-22. Why was it absolutely necessary that something or someone had to die? The Old Testament period was the period *before* Jesus Christ. The Old Testament teaches and illustrates why it was necessary that something or someone had to be sacrificed and die.

- **The nature of God.** God is holy and righteous and hates every kind of sin.

- **Atonement by God and reconciliation with God.** Therefore, human beings can only draw near to the holy God when his holy and righteous indignation (anger) against sin has been satisfied by the just punishment of their sins. This is called "atonement of sins". Only when atonement for the sins of a person has been made, can he be reconciled to God. *A sacrifice that punishes sins and thus satisfies the righteous and holy anger of God against sin and that reconciles the sinner to God is called "a sacrifice of atonement"*. During the Old Testament period, God commanded people to bring animal sacrifices as sacrifices of atonement.

- **Atonement through blood.** A "covenant" is a will or testament and is ratified only by the death of someone. Thus, *the Old Testament covenant was effective only by the shedding of the blood of animals.*

- **Atonement through the blood of the Seed.** God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants "in his Seed" all the families on earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18-19). He ratified that covenant in the New Testament by *the shedding of blood* of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; cf. Genesis 15:9-21)

² Jesus Christ humbled himself by descending to "the lower, earthly regions" (Ephesians 4:9-10; cf. psalm 139:15; John 3:12-13). This does not refer to the grave or the underworld (Hades, the realm of the dead), but to his incarnation (becoming a human being) on earth, just as "he ascended higher than all the heavens" refers to his ascension to heaven.

The animal sacrifices symbolised that the animal died in the place of the sinner. Every year, the high priest sprinkled blood before the curtain in the temple and smear blood on the horns of the incense altar in order to make atonement for his own sins and the sins of the people.

▪ **The Old Testament sacrifices were imperfect and therefore temporary.**

Why were the Old Testament sacrifices imperfect and thus temporary?

Read Hebrews 9:7-10; Hebrews 10:1-4. The Old Testament sacrifices were imperfect and temporary.

- **Animal sacrifices were ineffective.** We read that after these animal sacrifices were brought, the people still felt guilty for their sins. The people living during the Old Testament period continued to bring animal sacrifices, day after day, year after year, because they *continued to feel guilty and ashamed* of their sins. The blood of animals could not take away the guilt and shame of their committed sins! They could not remove the guilt and shame of their sins, because human beings are completely different than animals.

- **Animal sacrifices were only a preparation** for the New Testament period of fulfilment.

- **Animal sacrifices were “a shadow of the realities”**, which would come in the future. The animal sacrifices during the Old Testament period were only “types”, that is, “symbols” pointing to a future and real fulfilment. The animal sacrifices had to remind people of the guilt and shame of their sins, convince them that people cannot do anything to save themselves and point to the absolute necessity of a future sacrifice of atonement for their sins!

The law of animal sacrifices had to be fulfilled by a human sacrifice.

The *perfect and permanent solution* for the problem of *human sin* and *human suffering* was not the bringing of an animal sacrifice, but the bringing of a *human sacrifice*!

2. The perfect sacrifice must fulfil four conditions.

Who is the perfect and permanent human sacrifice that made atonement for human sins and reconciles sinners to God?

A perfect human sacrifice must fulfil four important conditions:

• **First condition: The perfect sacrifice must be a human.**

Read Philippians 2:6-7. Animal sacrifices or sacrifices of things like money or incense cannot be a perfect sacrifice. *Animals* or *things* are unlike human beings and cannot take away the guilt and shame of *human* sins. The *repeated* sacrifice of animals and things by people in the past history and in the present time proves that they cannot remove the guilt, shame or power of their human sins. If they could, they would have stopped!

However, Jesus Christ is God who took on the human nature. If Jesus were not a human being, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings. Because Jesus was a human being (John 1:1,14), he qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of human sins. This condition might have been fulfilled by any human being.

• **Second condition: The perfect sacrifice must die willingly.**

Read John 10:17-18; John 15:13; A human being that does not die willingly cannot be a perfect sacrifice. A person who dies unwillingly cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Who is willing to become the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others? Look around you, the more people possess things, the less they are willing to die themselves. People live selfish and protective life-styles. They build high fences around themselves, install alarm systems, keep dogs and guns and take out all kinds of life insurances. They do this, because they do not want to die! People eat health foods, exercise and pay lots of money to doctors in order to stretch life a little longer. There are not many human beings that are willing to die for other people.

However, Jesus Christ laid down his life by his own decision, deliberately and completely willing. If Jesus did not die willingly, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings and God could not have accepted his sacrifice as atonement for sins. Because Jesus died deliberately and completely willing, he qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of sins. This condition might have been fulfilled by a very few people.

• **Third condition: The perfect sacrifice must be sinless.**

Read Romans 3:23; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:26-27. A human being³ that is not sinless cannot be a perfect sacrifice! A person who has sinned at any time cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Who among all human beings in the history of the world has always been sinless? The Bible says that all human beings in the history of the world have sinned. None of the great people who ever lived were sinless!

However, although Jesus Christ was tempted like all human beings, he always remained without sin. The Bible and all its witnesses say that Jesus Christ was always totally sinless. During his life on earth, he gave himself in an unselfish and self-sacrificial way in order to serve and to save the sinful people of the world. If Jesus were not sinless, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings. Because Jesus Christ was the only human being who was sinless, only he in the whole history of mankind qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, this condition could never have been fulfilled by any other than Jesus Christ!

³ Even if he were the greatest prophet.

• **Fourth condition: The perfect sacrifice must be *God's choice for the task.***

Read 1 Peter 1:18-20; Matthew 3:16-17; John 1:29-34; John 3:16. A human being that has not been appointed by God for the task of dying for the sins of the world cannot be a perfect sacrifice. A human being who has not been chosen and called by God to die as a sinless sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world, cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Although there are several religious leaders who claim that they have been chosen and called by God, none of them have been chosen by God and called by God to die as a sinless sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people in the world.

However, the God of the Bible

- *chose Jesus Christ before the creation of the world* (1 Peter 1:20)
- *predicted his coming during the Old Testament period* (Psalm 22: 16-18; Isaiah 53:5-6)
- *and called him at the right time in human history* (Galatians 4:4) (at the beginning of the New Testament period) to die as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of people.

He was called:

- *visibly* in the sight of many people by the descent of the Holy Spirit on him
- and called *audibly* by God's voice from heaven with the words: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Although many other prophets received from God the command to bring a messenger that recites revelations to people, *none of them received their calling visibly or audibly in the sight of many people (as witnesses)*! None of these so-called prophets were *sinless*! The task to take away the holy and righteous wrath of God (by paying the penalty) and by reconciling these people to God was only given to Jesus Christ in the whole history of the world! If God had not chosen Jesus Christ for this task, he would also have been disqualified to be the atonement sacrifice for the sins of people. Jesus Christ was also not chosen democratically by majority vote to this task, but was the only One chosen in a sovereign way by the God of the Bible. Because Jesus Christ is the only One in human history who has been chosen on the basis of all four conditions, he is the only One in history qualified to be the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of people!

Conclusion. In human history, only Jesus Christ met all four conditions! Jesus Christ was not only human and completely willing to die for others, but he was also perfectly sinless and the only human being to whom God has given the task of being the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of this world!

3. The unique characteristics of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

What are three unique characteristics of the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ?

Read Hebrews 9:12-14,24-26.

• **The first unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who works *in heaven.***

All other priests in the history of the world performed (and still perform) their duties in human buildings on earth as temples, church buildings and mosques.

But Jesus Christ did not work as a priest in any earthly building. He serves in the heavenly temple where he represents his people right in the presence of the God of the Bible! Therefore, religious ceremonies in earthly religious buildings cannot save anyone in the world.

• **Second unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who *sacrificed himself.***

All other priests in the history of the world brought (and still bring) an animal or something as a sacrifice.

But only Jesus Christ did not bring an animal or anything else as a sacrifice, but brought himself as the sacrifice of atonement! "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22)! Only by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ (i.e. his death on the cross) Jesus Christ obtained an eternal redemption which purifies people not simply outwardly and ceremoniously⁴, but inwardly and genuine eternal.

• **Third unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who *sacrificed only once.***

All other religions bring endless sacrifices (animals, incense, flowers, fruits, etc), sometimes daily, other times yearly.

But only Jesus Christ was not sacrificed again and again, but brought a perfect sacrifice of atonement only *once in history*! Thus he *once and for all time* permanently took away the impurities, the guilt, the shame, the power and the doom of sin! Therefore, sacrifices that are repeated today and the ceremonies that belong to it are completely useless! The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a once in history sacrifice of atonement that can never and never will be repeated!

4. The purpose of the sacrifice of atonement of Christ.

Discuss. Why did Jesus Christ *have to die*?

All people in the world are by nature sinners and as such enemies of God. By nature, all people are ungodly, that is, they live their lives without God and miss God's purpose for their lives. And by nature all people are impure and remain impure in spite of performing purification rites. All people are powerless to change this hopeless condition by themselves.

⁴ All other religions in the world bring animals sacrifices, perform religious duties (as for example ablutions and eating "clean" food) and try to fulfill religious duties (as praying and fasting) in order to "purify" themselves. Their purification is always an outward, ritual and temporary, never inward, genuine or everlasting!

However, the death of Jesus Christ is God's means to justify sinners in his eyes and reconcile them to himself. And the death of Jesus Christ is God's means to purify unclean people and sanctify them (i.e. remove all impurities from them completely and to dedicate them to living a holy life)!

- **The death of Jesus Christ justifies believers.**

Read Romans 5:6-10; 1 Peter 2:24. Jesus Christ died to solve the greatest human *problem* called "sin". His death became God's punishment for our sins. If God did not punish our sins, he might have been called merciful and loving, but certainly not holy and just (righteous)!

Christ's death made it possible for us to be justified. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is declared righteous (forgiven, saved, freed) and is forever regarded and treated as perfectly righteous, that is, all his sins have been forgiven! The problem that separated us from God, namely "sin", has been removed. At the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, all his sins are put onto Christ's body and nailed to the cross. Also the feelings of guilt are completely removed from believers!

- **The death of Jesus Christ reconciles believers.**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 Peter 3:18. Jesus Christ died to take away the disastrous *consequences* of our sin, which are separation from God, living without God or even living as enemies of God.

Christ's death became the bridge that opens the way for all sinners back to God. His death made it possible for all unbelievers, ungodly people and enemies of God to become reconciled to God, that is, to become children of God. Jesus Christ is the Mediator, who brings lost people back to God. THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that perfect atonement of sins has been made for the believer and that the believer will never be separated from God. Also the experience of being separated from God is removed from believers!

- **The death of Jesus Christ purifies believers.**

Read Genesis 3:8-10,21; Galatians 3:27. Jesus Christ died to remove the shame of impurity. Believers are clothed with the garments of righteousness, purity and holiness of Jesus Christ. The feelings of shame about impurities are removed from believers!

- **The death of Jesus Christ sanctifies believers.**

Read Hebrews 10:10,14. Jesus Christ died to make believers perfectly holy, i.e. to remove all their sins and impurities and to dedicate their lives to God. Also the experience of not being holy (i.e. the slavery to wrong things and the contamination of perversion) is removed from believers!

5. The manner in which Christ died.

Discuss. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

- **Jesus died on a cross in order to take the curse away.**

Read Galatians 3:10-11; Galatians 3:12-14. Fourteen hundred and fifty years *before* Jesus Christ, the prophet Moses said, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Deuteronomy 27:26). "Cursed" means, "marked for destruction". Not a single person in the whole world can keep the regulations of the ceremonial law and therefore all people in the whole world are "marked for destruction"! Without a Saviour, people are marked for destruction by God's eternal judgement. Whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ, stands *permanently* condemned (perfect tense) in God's eyes and God's wrath remains *continually* (present tense) on him (John 3:18,36).

Jesus Christ became a curse for us. Moses also said, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23). The life of Jesus Christ was destroyed by nailing him to a cross. Jesus Christ was crucified, that is, nailed to a cross, in order to redeem us from the curse of the law. His life was "destroyed" to save us from being "destroyed" by not keeping God's law perfectly.

- **The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a fulfilment of prophecy.**

Read Psalm 22:16-18; Isaiah 53:5-6. One thousand years before Christ David prophesied that the hands and feet of the real Messiah King would be "pierced" (by long nails). And seven hundred years before Christ the prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be "pierced" for our transgressions.

These prophecies are amazing, because *crucifixion* as a means of punishment was invented by the Romans and only introduced in Israel about 100 years before Christ! To be crucified for one's own sins was one of the worst sufferings the human race invented in all human history. But for Christ, to be crucified for the sins of all the people in the world, while he himself was completely sinless, was the worst suffering in all human history!

Summary⁵. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering by his DEATH on the cross. He carried *the punishment for sin* and suffered *the experience of being forsaken by God*. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave

⁵ How can sins that are committed by believers in Jesus Christ and that are experienced in the present time, be atoned?

- 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. Jesus Christ died for all your sins. ""Be reconciled to God." Regard every sin you have committed and have confessed as having been placed on the body of Christ and nailed to the cross 2000 years ago! Believe that God has removed all your sins and believe that God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to you!

his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST guarantees that he takes away sins, reconciles sinners to God and purifies and sanctifies them for ever!

D. THE FOURTH STEP: JESUS CHRIST WAS RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact.

What evidence proves that Jesus Christ was really resurrected from the dead?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

Jesus Christ was really resurrected from the dead! “The gospel” or “good news” of the Bible is that Jesus Christ not only died for our sins, but that he was raised from the dead and lives! There are more eyewitnesses of his death and resurrection, as well as more written documentation of his death and resurrection, than for any other event in the history of mankind before this present century!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a miracle of God! Miracles cannot be proved or disproved by empirical science. Empirical science may not say that the resurrection of a dead person is impossible, because miracles like “life” itself and “the resurrection from the dead” cannot be proved or disproved by empirical science. Miracles do not belong to empirical science, but belong to the science of history and its facts are based on the dependability of its witnesses. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been witnessed and attested by more people than any other historical event in the history of the ancient world. Moreover, these witnesses have proved to be of the highest moral quality. Archaeology as well as non-Christian historical documents supports their testimonies!

2. The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Discover and discuss. What would happen if Christ were not really raised from the dead?

- **Then God would not have accepted Christ’s work of salvation by his life on earth and his death on the cross.**

Read Romans 1:2-4. *The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that God the Father has accepted the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ by his life and by his death on the cross!* Romans 1:2-4 does not contrast Christ’s human nature with his divine nature, but speaks of two aspects of the human nature of the Son of God.

The contrast is between the human nature of Jesus Christ before his death by virtue of his descent from David and his human nature after his resurrection from the dead by the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between Christ’s human state of humiliation after his birth and Christ’s human state of exaltation after his resurrection! The “Spirit of holiness” refers to the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus Christ first took on the weakened human nature which all people possess (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit always dwelled in Jesus Christ. But between his incarnation and resurrection from the dead the glory that Christ possessed inwardly was not able to reveal itself outwardly. He was “flesh”, that is, his human nature was mortal and weak (but without sin). In this weakness (of his human body) he was crucified (2 Corinthians 13:4). But in his death he laid aside the weakness of his human nature (his mortality) and severed every connection with sin (of the people for whom he died) and death. Through the Holy Spirit, God raised his human nature up, so that from that moment onwards he would no longer live in the weakness of the flesh but in the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:11).

By his resurrection Jesus was *once for all* “appointed (declared)⁶ to be the Son of God clothed with power. *From all eternity he was the mighty Son of God, but was once for all in human history* declared to be the mighty Son of God through his resurrection, ascension, enthronement and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 1:6-8; Acts 17:31; 1 Peter 1:3). During his state of humiliation (before his resurrection) his almighty power was as it were hidden from the view of people. But his state of humiliation could not last forever. By his resurrection, his human state of exaltation began to shine forth. “God made this Jesus whom the Jews crucified you “Lord⁷ and Christ” (by his resurrection)(Acts 2:36). This does not imply that he was not Lord and Christ before his resurrection. It means that the power, glory and majesty of his exalted human state began to shine forth only at his resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is:

- *the visible manifestation of the exalted human state of Lord Jesus Christ*
- *the conclusive evidence of the truth of all Christ taught*
- *and the validity of all his claims.*

The resurrection of Christ is the effective and powerful declaration of the truth of all his teachings and claims.

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- 1 John 1:8 - 2:2. Confess every sin at once and ask God to cleanse you. Believe that God (Christ) has forgiven you and has cleansed you from that specific sin. If you sin again, confess it immediately and receive his forgiveness and cleansing.
 - 1 Peter 4:1-5,12-19. Be prepared to suffer as a Christian! It costs a price to conquer a specific sin. Arm yourself with the attitude that when you withdraw from , you must suffer! Choose rather not to have friends than having the wrong friends; choose rather not to be popular and be understood than to belong to a group friends at the cost of a good conscience. Choose rather to exercise self-discipline than to give in to the desires of your body (sex, drugs, drinks, etc.). Choose rather to be honest than to keep up the appearance in front of people.
 - James 5:16. It helps to fight against a particular sin with the help of a mature friend.

⁶ Greek: horisthentos (aorist time, passive form)

⁷ The Greek word “kurios” (Lord) is the translation of the Hebrew word JahWeH (LORD)! See Isaiah 4:3 and Mark 1:3.

In short, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that God the Father has accepted the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ on the cross! If Jesus Christ were not resurrected from the dead, then everything he had accomplished by his life and death would have been utterly useless. But now Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead! HE LIVES!!!

- **Then faith in Jesus Christ would have been absolutely meaningless.**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:17-20. *The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely meaningful!* If Jesus Christ were not resurrected from the dead, faith in a dead Saviour would be utterly futile for living people. There would be no hope in any future and no life after death. Everything in life would end in death at the time of death and “death” would have the ultimate victory! For believers in Jesus Christ, that would be the ultimate suffering!

However, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead and he lives! He was resurrected from the dead as the guarantee that God has accepted his death as an atoning sacrifice for sins. And he lives in order to apply his completed work of salvation in the lives of very many individuals and families in all the nations on earth. While all other prophets and religious leaders in the world lie dead in their graves, the grave of Jesus Christ is empty! Jesus Christ lives and is at this very moment actively working in heaven to save people on earth! Neither physical death nor eternal death (i.e. hell), but spiritual life and eternal life will have the ultimate victory!

3. The benefits of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers.

Discuss. What are the two great benefits of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers?

Read Romans 6:3-14.

- **Believers receive a regenerated human spirit!**

The first benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the believer in Jesus Christ after his first coming receives (through the Holy Spirit) *a regenerated human spirit* through which he is able to live a genuine spiritual life on earth and grow spiritually. The enslaving power of sin dwelling in a person’s physical body has been broken. A believer in Jesus Christ can, wants to and will live the new life. He can, wants and will continually crucify his sinful deeds and increasingly bear the fruit of the Spirit.

- **Believers receive a transformed human body!**

The second benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the believer in Jesus Christ will receive *a transformed and glorified human body* at the general resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ and will inherit the new heaven and the new earth on which only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:8,27).

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering of man by his RESURRECTION from the dead. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST guarantees a new spiritual life now on this present earth and a new glorified body in the future on the new earth.

E. THE FIFTH STEP: JESUS CHRIST ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

Discuss the questions below.

1. The present authority of Jesus Christ.

Discuss. What is the present authority of Jesus Christ?

Read Luke 24:50-51; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:9-11. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. He is given the highest position and all authority in the universe. That is why he is called “Lord” (Acts 2:36; 1 Corinthians 12:3). He rules over the universe until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25) and until God has brought all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10). In the future, every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that he is truly the Lord of the universe. God already predicted this 2700 years ago (Isaiah 45:21-23)! No other religion can make such predictions!

Jesus Christ is also the Lord of the world wide Church and the Lord of every Christian. He rules the universe and the world and all the nations in the world in the interest of the Christian Church and Christians.

- He rules the world through his Word, which is recorded in the Bible.
- He rules the world through his Holy Spirit, who works in the hearts and lives of people.
- And he rules the world through his angels, who especially rescue God’s people (Hebrews 1:14) and execute God’s judgements on earth (Revelation 8:6 – 9:21).

His work culminates in the final judgement and in creating the new heaven and new earth in which only righteousness will dwell.

2. The present task of Jesus Christ.

Discuss. What is the present task of Jesus Christ?

Read the Bible references below. The very special task of Jesus Christ now is to completely save all people in the world who come to God through him (John 6:37). Every person, who believes in Jesus Christ, can have the following assurances:

- John 3:16. The genuine Christian has the assurance that he has eternal life.
- Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:23-25. The genuine Christian has the assurance that Christ knows all his circumstances, sympathises with all his weaknesses, prays continually for him and helps him with all his needs.
- Philippians 1:6. The genuine Christian has the assurance that God will continue the good work he has begun in him until it is absolutely completed. No one will be able to destroy his justification or salvation (John 18:9).
- Romans 8:28-39. The genuine Christian has the assurance that everything that happens to him has Christ's permission and is used by Christ to accomplish his eternal purpose. Nothing can separate him from God's love, presence and care.
- 1 Corinthians 15:25; Matthew 22:44; Revelation 17:14. The genuine Christian has the assurance that all enemies of Jesus Christ and Christians will eventually be conquered.

This work of Christ is happening right now! Jesus Christ is right now praying that you too may know him, be saved and share his wonderful new life (John 17:20).

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering by his ASCENSION into heaven by saving all people who come to God through him and by putting all his enemies under his feet. THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that he rules the universe in the interest of the Christian Church and applies his completed work of salvation in the lives of individual people on earth.

Summary. The 5 steps through which Jesus Christ as Mediator solved the problem of suffering and death:

1. Jesus Christ became *a human being* in order to reveal God and to identify himself completely with the suffering and needs of people on earth.
2. Jesus Christ became *a servant* in order to seek what is lost and to heal what is broken.
3. Jesus Christ *died on the cross* in order to take away the problem (sins) and the resulting consequence (separation from God).
4. Jesus Christ *was resurrected from the dead* in order to guarantee a new spiritual life on this present earth and a new glorified body on the future new earth.
5. Jesus Christ *ascended into heaven* in order to rule the universe in the interest of the Christian Church and to apply his completed work of salvation in the lives of individual people on earth.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

1. During the next week, read the Bible passages again. Consider what the Bible says about the solution to the problem of suffering and death.
 2. During the next week, consider the following question: "What do you think would be an appropriate response to God for everything he has done for you?" We will discuss this during the next session.
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